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MEMOIR

By
Tosia Szechter Schneider

Atlanta, spring 2000

Reminiscences

When I think of Zaleszczyki, what first comes to mind is the beautiful chestnut tree in front of our window. It was so lovely when in bloom and it provided us children with the chestnuts, which we collected for many happy hours of play. The stains on our hands from cracking the chestnuts' spiky green outer shells were difficult to wash away and our stained clothes were a great annoyance to our maid

My birthplace Zaleszczyki is in Galicia, which was Polish before WWII and is now part of the Ukraine. It was a small resort town on the Dniester River, which formed the border between Poland and Romania.

My father's family, the Szechters (sometimes the spelling was Schechter) lived in Torsk, a small village near Zaleszczyki.

We lived in an apartment which had a large inner court, with flowers in the center, and a number of offices facing the street. This was a marvelous world to explore. In one of the front offices was a watchmaker's place. What fun it was to watch him doing his work with that long funny instrument on his eye. He always gave us old springs to play with. Next door was a telegraph office where we listened to the mysterious clicking of the telegraph. We usually got home with a bunch of telegraph paper rolls.

One of our playmates was Jan "pokutnik" or Jan the penitent as he was called. Jan lived in our barn and on most days he could be found sitting in front of the nearby Catholic church, begging for alms. He had shoulder length shaggy gray hair, wore rags sown together and walked barefoot most of the time. He was a very simple minded man who loved children and often played with us. No one ever knew what his penance was for. The story was told that he had a well to do brother in America who sent him clothes and money, but he preferred to live as he did. One day my brother and I got little cork guns which we aimed at Janek. He would fall on the floor and pretend that he is dead. It was great fun, till my mother walked into the kitchen and when she saw Janek stretched out on the floor, she almost fainted. We did not know why she got so frightened Janek was such a good sport.

Almost every morning we waited with anticipation for the “bread” lady to come by, she was a poor Jewish lady who walked from house to house selling sweet rolls and breads. She carried a big basket, covered with a clean towel. What sweet aromas rose from that basket! It took my brother and me quite a while to make the final selection; after a lot of deliberation, I usually picked an almond covered a bear claw pastry, my favorite even today.

On the main street of our town, was an ice cream parlor. I loved to sit at the round little tables surrounded by a white picket fence all around and order my special ice cream. One day when my father took me for a walk and ice cream treat, he said that he wanted to tell me something important. He told me that I had a twin brother, that his name was Janek and that he had lived only six weeks. Father said that one day he would take me to the cemetery and show me his grave. I don’t think I understood very well what death meant but his expression was so sad, and I felt very sad too.

My father, Jacob Szechter, worked at that time for the estate of Count Lubomirski. I must have been three or four when my father took me along with him to the estate. We rode in a handsome horse-drawn carriage and on the way my father instructed me how to greet our hosts: I was to kiss their hands and curtsy. When the time came, I did a respectable curtsy, but I refused to kiss their hands, very much to my poor father’s embarrassment. I still think it was a silly custom. After showing me around the magnificent estate, with its horses, cattle, and hunting dogs, I was put to bed in one of the rooms. The walls of the room were studded with all kinds of stuffed animal heads. The big boar’s head was especially frightening. To my father’s great dismay, I refused to sleep there and did not stop crying until he promised to take me home. Not a glorious ending, to be sure, but what a relief to be home again.

My brother Julek, two years older than I, was always my close companion, as we explored the world around us. He was a quiet, serious boy, very much unlike my tomboy tendencies. The summers were an exciting time in Zaleszczyki, with many tourists from far-away places. Lovely little boutiques lined the main street, mannequins

in swimming attire stood on the sidewalks, and they always fascinated me. My mother used to take us to the river almost daily. There were two beaches on the river: the "Sunny Beach", which we visited in the morning and the "Shady Beach" for the afternoons. Or was it the other way around? I don't quite remember. But what I do remember, is the military band of the border guards, which played on the bandstand while grownups strolled and children played. Everyone admired the handsome Romanian officers who sometimes crossed the bridge to participate in some festivities.

Every afternoon, during the summer months, in all the coffeehouses that lined the main street, the "fife", as we used to call, was in full swing. At five o'clock the bands played dance music and the young people danced and sipped cool beverages. This was an opportunity for the locals to meet people from far away places, and of course, romances flourished.

In the same town also lived my paternal grandmother, and my father's sister's family, the Rosenbaums. My two cousins, Lusia and Julia, were a few years older than I was. They were for me, a source of incredible wonder and sophistication. We visited and played together quite often. My grandmother, who lived in the same building, always welcomed us with sweets and we greatly enjoyed playing in her apartment.

At the age of five, I started to attend a Jewish kindergarten. I still recall some of the songs we were taught. My teacher was a tall, blond, lovely lady. It was a bit of a shock when I met her in Israel, forty years later, by now a small, gray-haired woman. One day, our class went on an outing near the bridge. As we settled down for our lunch, we were pelted with rocks by a group of Polish kids, shouting anti-Semitic slurs at us. For me, it was the first, but sadly not the last time, to witness anti-Semitism raise its ugly head in Poland.

I remember the sled rides in the winter and the wonderful taste of hot cocoa afterward. We had a maid, a Ukrainian girl, who told us scary stories about Baba Jaga, the bad witch, who snatches misbehaving children and takes them to her forest hideout.

When I was about four, our family traveled to my mother's hometown of Horodenka for the Passover holidays. I shall never forget the excitement and the joy of meeting my

four cousins, my aunts Zlata and Mincia, Uncle Jacob and, of course, my grandparents. My grandmother took me to the bakery where the matzos were being baked. At long tables women and girls mixed the dough and flattened it into round matzos, which the baker then fed into hot, wood burning ovens. The excitement and the speed of the work fascinated me. The finished matzos were collected in large white sheets and carried home. There they were stored high on top of a cabinet, not to be touched till Passover eve. My grandfather David assembled all the grandchildren the afternoon before the Seder, and gave each grandchild a little glass cup for the Seder. My cup had the Hebrew word "Pesach" inscribed on it. I was so proud to have my own Pesach "wine" cup.

As evening approached, the whole family was gathered around a long table. My grandfather wore a white "kittel" (a silken white robe) and he reclined on the cushions in his chair, as was customary. I can still see the glowing happy faces of my parents and the whole family. As the evening progressed, the Haggadah was read, the song were sung and the traditional foods eaten, but I had fallen asleep long before the evening ended. This was my first and the most memorable Passover.

When I was six years old, we moved to my mother's hometown of Horodenka. It was a typical East European "shtetl" The main street was lined with mostly Jewish stores. There was a "drogeria" where cosmetics were sold. The store was owned by my mother's best friend, Shancia Wagner. Mother usually stopped to chat with her after we did our errands. I loved to look at the lovely displays of perfumes, powders and other cosmetics. I usually came home with a little mirror or other treasure. Only two stores down was another cosmetic store. The two storeowners were archenemies. Needless to say, our town could hardly support two such stores. There was a very nice bookstore and a fabrics store on that street as well as a grocery store where we used to shop.

On some of the side streets in the Jewish part of town lived and worked all kinds of craftsmen: carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers and tanners. I did not like to walk by the tanner's place, where an unpleasant odor was always emanating.

The first year we lived at my grandmother's house. I loved the warm atmosphere; I

liked my big cousins, Wisia, Bella and Max. I was saddened to discover that my youngest cousin Wisia (Rosenbaum) was deaf-mute. She was a beautiful child, with dark red curls, but I felt the sorrow of my aunt and uncle in their efforts to find help for her.

My father got a job as an accountant in a large flourmill, owned by three Jewish families. He worked very hard but did not earn much and we lived very frugally. A year later, my parents bought a parcel of land and built a small house. It had two apartments of two rooms and a kitchen each. They rented one apartment and the rent they got was put aside for Julek's education, since one had to pay tuition in high school and Hebrew school, which we attended every afternoon.

The Hebrew school was a short distance from our house; classes were from three to five. Later, I used to tell my American students in Sunday school, that this was not a cruel and unusual punishment. We loved our Hebrew school, whose principal Itzchag Berger, a poet, was a very kind and wonderful man. He never passed a child without saying a kind word. Till today, I still wonder how these poorly paid teachers, in overcrowded dark classrooms were able to instill in us children such love and respect for our heritage and faith, which was so severely tried a few short years hence

In Horodenka, I started first grade in the Polish public school, next door to our house. Sometimes I simply jumped over the fence to get there. School started at eight o'clock, and we got home at noon. Our main meal was served around one o'clock. During the summer months, it usually consisted of a vegetable soup. My mother would ask me in the morning to pick carrots, sweet peas, parsnip, and beans from our garden and dig up some of the new potatoes to be served with chicken or beef. The herbs most frequently used were dill and parsley. Buttered new potatoes with dill were my absolute favorite. Dessert was not part of the meal, except on holidays and Shabbat, but fruit was always plentiful. My father came home for dinner. His favorite newspaper the "Chwila" (Moment), a Polish-Jewish paper, was waiting for him, he read and rested for an hour, and then went back to work. Supper was usually a very small meal, a sandwich or a pasta dish. Of course, the noodles were freshly made. If we were lucky, mother made "pierogy" - pasta dough stuffed with cheese or potatoes

and onions.

In the Polish school we Jewish children never quite felt on equal footing with the other kids. To be awarded a prize one had to be three times as good as a Polish kid. I socialized mostly with Jewish children.

It was at that time that I became inseparable from my childhood friend, Genia Reis. She lived just a few houses away from my grandmother's and we played together almost daily. She loved comic books, and dreamed of America where she had an aunt. We were all enamoured with Shirley Temple and we went to see her movies whenever we could. Genia had a brother, Lusiek, who was my brother's best friend, and a budding violinist (their mother was a very fine violinist). We spent a lot of time together. I had a youthful crush on Lusiek, but to my great dismay, he did not even notice that I existed.

We lived very close to a public park. I loved to sit at the window and watch young couples stroll by. On nice summer days especially on Shabbat most people would wear their best clothes and stroll up and down the street. Girls in groups, on one side of the road, the boys on the other. They would steal glances at each other, whisper and giggle. In spring, as the lilac bloomed in our garden and the songs of birds were heard, the world seemed perfect and beautiful and so full of promise....

On many Sundays my father and my brother were occupied with their stamp collection, which was quite extensive. My father was an avid philatelist and I remember letters arriving from far-away places. Some came from Africa and had triangular stamps. It was then that I first learned about the fabulous country across ocean, which later was to become my home. My father's sister lived in New York and her letters were eagerly awaited..

In winter, we went skiing and ice-skating. One winter, we decided to build our own ice-skating ring. My brother and Lusiek were the engineers and Genia and I carried the water for this project. It was all great fun, but pneumonia followed shortly afterward and I had to stay in bed for quite a while.

The big excitement of the winter season was the annual Chanukah play, which our Hebrew school put on. One year, I was the queen of snowflakes. With my long blond

hair freed from braids and combed out to flow down my back, I sat on a sled and was pulled onto the stage by the snowflakes. All went well for a while until, as was customary, candies were thrown onto the stage. One landed in my eye. Thus, my first and last public appearance on a stage ended in tears.

As spring approached, weeks before the Passover holidays, preparations began in earnest. Most rooms were freshly painted, it was a common sight in town to see furniture and dishes stacked in the yard as the kitchens were freshly white-washed and the living rooms, painted. As time drew nearer, the holiday dishes were taken down from the attic, the geese were fed with a special fattening food to make them plump and ready. The house was cleaned from top to bottom. I especially enjoyed helping to polish the living room floor. Paste was applied to the burgundy colored floor, brushes were attached to your feet and then you danced around the room till you could see your face reflected on the floor. The beating of the runners was less fun, but the house looked so nice and clean when all the chores were done. A few days before the holidays preparing the kitchen utensils and making them "kosher" for Pesach began. The kitchen utensils were placed in large kettles filled with water and then red-hot stones were thrown inside. The steam was rising and the work was speeding up but the kids always seemed to be under the feet.

When Passover holidays coincided with Good Friday, there was always some apprehension in the community. Some of the ruffians in town found this to be an opportune time to attack Jews and shouts of "Christ killers", were heard again.

One summer, my father took me on a trip to visit our family in Zaleszczyki. I was very excited and prepared for the trip for many days. The day finally arrived and my mother packed for us sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs and fruit, all in a neat basket covered with a snow-white napkin. Early in the morning, a horse-drawn carriage arrived to bring us to the railroad station. I was so excited. It was only a journey of 20 or 30 Km., but for me it was a wonderful adventure.

When I was growing up, children always helped around the house. There were no laborsaving appliances, so fetching wood for the stove, or storing food in the cold

cellar (there were no refrigerators) were our chores. I liked to go down into the cellar on hot summer days and feel the cold damp walls. The chilled sour cream and yogurt tasted so well with freshly picked strawberries from our garden. We had pear and apple trees and a wonderful plum tree. In the last few years before the war, my father planted three peach trees. We never tasted their fruits, because in accordance according with Jewish law one is not allowed to eat the fruit till the fourth year. In that fourth year the war broke out and our world was destroyed forever.

The housewives in town would start shopping on Thursdays for Sabbath. Usually one purchased a live chicken that was taken to the "shochet", who performed the ritual slaughter of the bird. Sometimes I went with my mother to the "shochet" but I did not like to see all that blood and gore sight. Afterwards the feathers were plucked and the bird was salted to make it "kosher" before cooking.

Friday morning the cleaning began in earnest. The kitchen table was scrubbed with a brush, as was the wooden floor, Clean new kitchen runners were spread. The wonderful smells of freshly baked "Chalah" and cinnamon and raisin loafs filled the house.

Now it was time for the weekly bath. When my father came home, before my hair was washed and combed, the usual discussion began. "Why don't you cut her hair and stop this yammering when you try to comb out her tangled hair?", My mother never did subject me to the threatened haircut

Many times on Fridays my mother would send me to the lending library (there was no public library in our town) to get a book she had reserved. I think it cost five or ten groshen, for a few days. After the meal, when the dishes were washed and put away, my mother would relax on the kitchen sofa (my bed) and read. I loved to snuggle up next to her, and read or daydream

Wash days were a monthly affair lasting for three days. First the clothes were soaked overnight, next the white laundry was boiled on the stove in large kettles, then it was scrubbed and rinsed and soaked again overnight with a bluing agent and starch. The laundry was hung in the attic to dry and the ironing began. The live coals heating the iron had to be frequently replenished from the stove. This long and laborious process

rendered the laundry wonderfully white and starched.

On summer days after school I used to play volleyball with my friends; I was pretty good at it and loved the game. My brother and my father played the flute and I remember falling asleep many an evening listening to my father's playing.

Shopping was almost a daily routine because of the lack of refrigeration. I used to accompany my mother to the open market where the peasants brought their wares for sale. Bargaining was part of the course: one would inspect the chicken, cheese, or fruit, ask for the price and then walk away to the next stall to compare the price and the produce. After a bit of bargaining, we walked home with baskets laden with produce. Canned or frozen foods were not available. Most housewives were very busy in the fall canning and preserving food. At our home, cucumbers and cabbage were pickled in large barrels and jam (povidla) was prepared in large copper kettles. We kids always managed to get in the way, but occasionally we helped to pit the plums. In those busy days, as the preparations for the winter were speeding up, we always had women from the village help my mother. Large quantities of potatoes and other root vegetables were stored in the cellar.

In fall, as our High Holidays approached, preparation for the Days of Awe began. It was customary to visit the cemetery before the holidays. My mother took me once with her to visit grandfather's grave. She placed a pebble on the gravestone, stroked the stone, prayed and cried. I learned that my grandfather David, was a "Cohen" of the priestly caste. According to custom, he was not buried in the cemetery proper but on the side, surrounded by a fence. It was also customary before the New Year to go to a body of flowing water and empty one's pockets of all the crumbs, symbolically getting rid of one's sins.

On New Years and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) all Jewish businesses were closed. The whole community was at prayer, in the great synagogue or in many little houses of prayer that could be found almost on every street. Our family prayed in our Hebrew school, which was converted during the holidays into a house of worship.

On the Day of Atonement, my parents, like most other Jews spent the whole day at the synagogue, fasting and praying. I especially remember the last service in 1938,

as the black clouds were gathering on the horizon, soul rending cries and prayers rose from the congregation, as though they had a premonition of things to come.

As fall turned to winter, the temperatures often dropped below zero. Snow covered the garden and I had to wade knee-deep in the snow to make my way to school. Slacks did not exist for girls. We had to wear wool stockings, which I hated because they itched. My beloved grandmother used to knit stockings and gloves for all her grandchildren, to keep them warm. Nevertheless, I had frostbites on my fingers and toes almost every winter because I loved to play in the snow.

The house was heated by woodburning stoves, a large one in the kitchen, and a beautiful burgundy colored tile stove in the living room. On very cold days, my mother would warm our winter underwear at the stove to entice us to get out from under our warm feather comforters and brave the cold. The windows were covered with ice flowers and water froze in the vestibule when the fire died out and the temperature dropped at night. My mother used to get up at the crack of dawn to start the fire in the stove and prepare our breakfast.

On winter days, our usual breakfast consisted of a hot cereal like cream of wheat and hot milk. Early in the morning, a peasant woman from the village would bring the fresh milk, which had to be boiled to pasteurize it. The more fat the milk contained, the more it was prized. When the milk was boiled, a thick skin formed on top. Most of my complaining in the morning was due to finding a bit of that skin in my milk. I hated it and I promised myself that when I grow up, I would never drink milk. Of course, I did not know then that in a far-away country, which would become my home, milk comes in plastic containers and is served cold, without the hated thick skin on top of it.

There were no ready-made clothes available in our town. Getting a dress or a coat was a long and drawn-out process. One had to go to a store to buy the cloth and all the trimmings, then one found a seamstress (my aunt Zlata was one of the best in town.) where one was measured, a paper pattern was made, and the cloth was cut and stitched together. Then there were several fittings until, finally, the dress was ready. We usually got a new outfit for Pesach and new school clothes in the fall. My

mother sewed beautifully and made many of my dresses. Of course, we did not have the closets full of clothes the way children have today. One usually had one good dress for holidays and special occasions, one or two dresses for every day, and a couple of skirts and blouses. Every bit of material was saved. A worn coat was taken apart, turned inside out and made into a dress or skirt for a child. Nothing was wasted, since it was difficult to make ends meet.

In 1938 my brother Julek applied for enter in the "gymnasium" . He studied very hard all summer for the entrance exams. What amazed me was that he had to take an exam in Latin , which was not taught in public school. The exams lasted a few days. Even though my brother was a very good student. my parents were nervous. Each morning they posted the names of the students who had passed the day before. We all crowded around the board , and to my parent's great relief my brother's name appeared one morning.

My father did not earn much. There were constant worries how to pay for the Hebrew school, the "gymnazium" (high school) and save enough money to be able to sent my brother to study abroad. My parents agonized about the growing anti-Semitism in Poland, but hoped to be able to send my brother to study in England. Very few girls aspired to a higher education at that time. In my mother's family, only Uncle Jacob attended a university and he became a chemist. Her two sisters, Mincia and Zlata, completed high school and my mother became a teacher. She taught only for a very short time, because it was difficult for a Jew in Poland to get a government job. They sent my mother to a remote village, where the peasants did not want their children to go to school, since they needed them to help on the farm. Very few peasants in our region could read or write. The priest and only a few other men were literate.

Many a Saturday we assembled at my grandmother's where the adults were sitting in the living room, sipping tea and talking. Very often the conversation turned to their experiences during WWI. I heard stories about the Cossacks burning, looting and raping women, and about the family's escape to Vienna. I was fascinated with the story of how they had smeared my mother's face with charcoal, to make her look ugly,

so the Cossacks would not get her. The Vienna stories sent a mixed signal: sometimes, they spoke of the joy of discovering that beautiful city, about the Prater and the Vienna woods, but they also spoke of the hunger and the hardships they endured. They recalled with sadness their return home, only to find their house burned, and how they had to start rebuilding their lives again. My grandfather built his house himself. Being quite artistic, he decorated the ceiling with beautiful medallions and painted birds on the veranda walls.

The cousins usually assembled on the porch, munching kichlech (cookies) which my grandmother used to bake. The girls sang songs and teased one another. They loved to comb my long blond hair and put it up in fancy braids. The girls always teased my brother and his friends for being infatuated with a girl called Blanka, their schoolmate and the daughter of a well-known doctor in town. The boys used to serenade Blanka under her window. Lusiek played the violin and my brother the flute but, it seemed, they did not capture her heart.

In the summer of 1938, an Olympic size swimming pool was built in our town. A lovely garden with benches surrounded the pool. Jewish children could only look at the pool with envy from afar, because a sign proclaimed that Jews and dogs were not allowed in the pool. We would stroll in the park, listen to the music playing, and watch many young people dance and swim and feel quite dejected.

My father was a typical European man of his time; he never did any manual work around the house. One morning I remember seeing a most unusual sight my father with a bucket of water and a brush in his hand. He was trying to erase graffiti from our wall: "Precz z Zydami" (Out with the Jews). My father was very angry. In 1918, he volunteered to fight with the newly formed Polish army under Marshal Pilsudski. He believed that if Jews help to fight for an independent Poland, they will enjoy full civil rights and anti-Semitism will disappear. Kids would yell at us: go to Palestine; as though we did not want to. For many of us it was an ardent dream.

Anti-Semitism was intensifying in Poland. In the universities there was a "numerus clausus", which allowed only a certain percentage of Jews to enter and Jewish students were required to sit only in the back rows. Incidents of violence were often

reported. A law was passed in parliament, outlawing the Jewish ritual slaughter of cattle, and this brought great distress to Orthodox Jews like my grandmother.

My grandmother lived with my aunt Zlata who was divorced. Grandmother was quite orthodox and she wore a "shaytel" (wig). On Saturdays, she always sat with her prayerbook in her hands when she greeted her children and grandchildren.

Zlata was a very fine seamstress and many women in town came to her to have their dresses made. They would sit in the little entrance hall and study carefully the latest fashion magazines from Paris. After they selected an outfit, my aunt would advise them what fabric to buy. Then came endless fittings, until the dress fit perfectly. Several apprentices were working for my aunt and I liked to hang around, listen to their singing and pick up scraps of fabric for my dolls.

Two houses down Strzelecka Street lived my mother's youngest sister Mincia with her husband Nathan and their three children. My uncle had an oil press. Peasants brought their sunflower seeds to be pressed into oil. I liked to observe them as they worked. But I felt sorry for the horse that, with covered eyes, walked round and round in a circle turning the heavy shaft, which caused the heavy millstones to press the oil out of the seeds. The golden liquid flowed into cans; my uncle's workclothes glistened with oil and his face with sweat. He did not earn much for this hard labor and the family struggled to pay the high school tuition for their oldest daughter Bella and for the many medical expenses for little Wisia, who was a deafmute child. They took her to Vienna to see a specialist and teach her sign language.

My mother's brother, Uncle Jacob, worked in Leipzig, Germany, as a chemist. He used to come every year to Horodenka for a visit. All my cousins and I looked forward to his visit, not only because he always brought us wonderful presents, but also because he really tried to get to know us. He was a bachelor who seemed to enjoy spending time with his nephews and nieces.

We used to assemble at grandmother's house when his letters arrived and read and reread them many times. Our concerns increased with the worsening situation in Germany. The family pleaded with him to leave Germany and he was about to do so when, in October 1938, the Germans expelled all Jews who were Polish citizens.

They were forced across the border to an internment camp in Zbaszcz. My uncle eventually settled in Warsaw. With a partner he opened a factory dyeing the pelts of domestic foxes to make them look like silver foxes, which was the rage at that time.

Black clouds were gathering on the horizon and shortly thereafter Hitler annexed Austria. We read with horror how in the streets of Vienna thousands of jubilant Austrians had welcomed the Germans.

Jews in our town belonged to all kinds of political factions. There were those who looked to the east, and believed in the promise of freedom and equality so loudly proclaimed by the Bolshevik government. Most of these Communists were imprisoned and persecuted in Poland; some lived to experience the bitter disillusionment when they saw Communism in practice. Many young people were Zionists of every stripe, from left to right. They fought and debated about the political structure of a country that did not exist! Yet that dream, to have a piece of land of their own, of the return to Zion, burned deeply in many hearts. My mother was active in "Wizo" - The World Zionist Organization. In every house there was a "pushka", a little blue and white box, into which people placed a few "groshn" to purchase land in Palestine.

As time went on, my father became more and more disillusioned with the government and the frequent anti-Semitic incidents; he encouraged my brother to join a Zionist youth group.

In the summer of 1939, my brother Julek went to a Zionist camp (Ha'noar Ha'zioni) in the Carpathian mountains. I was so jealous and also wanted to go, but I was promised that next year, when I would be old enough, I would go.

My mother, grandmother, aunt Zlata, cousin Wisia and I, went to Delatin, a small resort town nearby. Father stayed home to work, there were no paid vacations then. We visited my brother's camp and as far the eye could see there were tents and boys and girls in blue and white uniforms strolled around. Blue and white flags fluttered in the breeze. Who could have foreseen, that this, our beautiful youth, will be brutally murdered in a few short years?

We took long walks in the beautiful woods and I played and splashed in the cold mountain brook near the little house that the family had rented. We ate many meals at

a restaurant, which was a big treat for me, since we hardly ever ate out. I was so happy during that summer.

The second week of August, a telegram arrived from my father, asking us to return home on the first available train. My mother woke me up at night, we dressed and got ready to leave. Early in the morning she managed to wake up a grocer in the little town and bought some provisions for the journey. There was not much in that little store and I saw her do the unthinkable: buy not only cookies and candies but also whatever else was available. It crossed my mind that the war, which everyone was expecting, could not be so bad after all, if it started with all those goodies.

Mobilization had started. At every railroad station we saw troops moving west. The trip home was uneventful. I munched the sweets and watched the troubled faces of the adults without much comprehension of what lay ahead.

When we got home, we learned of the German ultimatum and that full mobilization had been decreed. My father and my brother -one too old the other too young- were mobilized for civil defense. They walked around in steel helmets. Their duties were to make sure that all the windows were covered or blackened, and they built trenches to hide in case of air attacks. On the outskirts of town, fields were leveled to build an airstrip. We children were bringing drinking water for the workers. It seemed that, for a short while, all the people in town had a common goal- to fight the enemy. Little did we know as we struggled to build an airport that a few days later almost all the Polish planes will be destroyed on the ground. Wild rumors were flying all around us. In spite of all happenings, my friends and I were getting ready for the new school year. I ran around town buying second-hand books (textbooks were not free in Poland) from those children who had a reputation of being good and neat students. I had all my books for fifth grade and couldn't wait for school to start.

On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland and now we were at war. Preparations started in earnest and people worried that the Germans will use poison gas. Each household received some kind of a liquid concoction. We were instructed to dip cotton into this liquid and breathe through it. I shall never forget what happened when the first alarm sounded; my mother covered the windows with pillows, as

instructed, but she got caught in the curtains, spilled the special liquid and when the "all clear" was heard she sat on the floor crying and laughing at the same time. I think she realized, perhaps for the first time, how vulnerable we all were and how pathetic our defenses stacked up against that mighty terror sweeping our country.

One morning a real attack took place. We were awakened early in the morning by the sirens. We ran in our nightclothes and jumped into the trench that my father and brother had dug in the garden. I could hear the whistle of the bombs and suddenly I climbed out of the trench and ran home. After the attack I was reproached and asked why I had done it. I said I did not want to be buried alive, I wanted to die seeing the sky. I had to promise that I shall never do that again. There were some casualties in town, although most of the bombs had fallen into a pond.

We began to see refugees in town from all over Poland. Many people were fleeing to Romania, among them were many high government officials. The town's people offered food and lodging to the refugees but we were stunned to hear some of them ask if we were Jews and then they told us, that they did not want to accept any help from Jews. Even then, in their darkest hour of defeat, some of the Poles did not forget their vicious anti-Semitism. My parents also considered fleeing to Romania, and after much discussion it was decided that my father and my brother should escape across the border. We had heard that in Germany Jewish men were taken to slave labor camps; but everyone thought that women and children would be safe. After much soul searching my parents decided not to split the family and await our fate together. The strong family bonds and love were our strength in times past, but now they doomed us all to destruction.

The news from the front was very bad. In mid-September, there suddenly was rejoicing in our town when a young Polish man raced through town yelling that he had seen Polish soldiers on Soviet tanks. We all thought that the Russians were coming to the aid of Poland, but the opposite was true: we were again stabbed in the back. The news of the Hitler-Stalin pact had been a severe blow to our expectations.

Within hours, Red Army tanks appeared on the city streets and the Soviet occupation began. The Russians treated Polish soldiers as prisoners of war and kept them in my

school, next door to our house. Julek and I were hanging on the fence and talking with them. Some soldiers threw money at us and asked us to buy cigarettes for them, which we did. For a while, the Russian guards allowed us to do that. Later, strange looking soldiers from Central Asia pointed their guns at us and motioned us to leave. The town organized a soup kitchen and in our garden food was prepared in huge kettles and carried to the prisoners. A few days later, we saw them being marched through our town holding up their trousers because their belts had been taken from them. We never learned what happened to these officer and soldiers and I wondered later whether they were the ones who were shot by the Soviets in the Katyn forest.

There was a lot of confusion, not only because we did not understand Russian but also the whole new system, was so foreign to us. Political indoctrination immediately began at work and in school. My father raged against it and that scared my mother. Within weeks, the schools reopened and for the first time we attended coeducational schools. In Poland, boys and girls had attended separate elementary schools. We were assigned to a Ukrainian school but I remember going with my mother and other parents and children to petition the Soviet superintendent of schools to allow us to open a Yiddish school. Permission was granted and a Yiddish school with grades one through four was opened. My mother taught in that school but I could not attend, since I was already a fifth grader. My mother and all other teachers were compelled to study the Constitution of the USSR, as well as the writings of Lenin and Stalin and she struggled with that late into the night.

For me, the change from the Polish school was not entirely unwelcome. For the first time, we did not feel the sting of anti-Semitism, all children were treated equally, or almost equally. The children of poor peasants and artisans became the elite, while those whose parents were formerly well-to-do were not always treated kindly. We sat in class under the watchful and "benevolent" eyes of Stalin and Lenin. The walls were covered with political slogans that we did not understand. The best students were urged to join the Pioneers, a communist youth group. I also joined and could not understand why my father was not thrilled when I showed up with a red kerchief around my neck. We were continuously told that the Soviet Union has many enemies

who try to infiltrate the borders and harm our people. All children had to attend paramilitary drills in which we marched with wooden rifles and occupied snow-covered hills outside of town. I found it to be great fun, but my parents thought it was an unnecessary political indoctrination.

At that time, my Uncle Jacob married a woman from Vilna who was a dentist and who spoke Russian very well. My uncle was given a "bad" passport (internal identification document) by the Soviets in which it was indicated that he was politically undesirable, having owned a factory before the war and, therefore could not remain in our town. He was threatened with exile to Siberia. The family was dismayed, his wife intervened with the authorities and pleaded for him. To everyone's great joy, his passport was exchanged for a "good" one allowing him to work in town and he opened a medical laboratory. Little did we know then that exile to Siberia might have saved his life.

In our town was a simple-minded water carrier named Myku. He had a clubfoot and one could hear him from far away stomping heavily as he carried pails of water that hung from a yoke on his shoulder. Friday afternoons, he made the rounds of Jewish households for "n'duve", alms of a few groshens for his Sabbath meal. One afternoon he came to our house and my mother told him not to go across the street to the Szpirer family because they had been arrested the night before and sent to Siberia. Myku, in his innocence, made a prophetic prediction: If they took the rich man Szpirer to Siberia, it must be good there. People laughed and repeated his foolish saying. Yet, in a way, he was right; Siberia was certainly preferable to the horror that was to befall our town.

We began to experience all kinds of shortages. One that was very difficult for my father to bear, was the lack of cigarettes. He was obviously addicted to nicotine, but no one thought in those terms at that time. He would buy loose tobacco, and with a little gadget my brother and I would fill prepared cigarette paper with tobacco for him. He could not stand the coarse "machorka" that the Russians rolled in newspaper and smoked. Everything was rationed. In the beginning, the merchants were very happy when the Russians bought everything in sight. They quickly found out, however, that one could not buy much with the rubles they received and that it was not possible to

replenish the merchandise. Whenever anything was sold in a store, long lines immediately formed. One bought whatever was sold and in the largest quantities permitted. It did not matter that one did not need galoshes size 13, one could still barter them for something useful. Staying in line became a full-time job, just to be able to feed the family.

Most of the Russians were friendly, but some of them, my parents thought, were rather primitive. The authorities requisitioned one room in our house and billeted three soldiers there. One of the officers was a "politruc", a political commissar, who, nevertheless, was an intelligent person. Before he was sent to the Finnish front, he had many discussions with my father. He predicted that the war in Europe would end in 1945. Eventually two of the officers left, and one of them brought his wife to live with him. They shared our kitchen and we began to learn how communism worked in practice: they simply helped themselves to anything they pleased, which irritated my mother greatly.

Fear gripped many people as the deportations to Siberia progressed. We heard the rumbling of trucks in the night as people were taken away. There were no trials, people simply vanished. Many former religious leaders, both Poles and Jews, and also political leaders and Zionists were exiled to Siberia. To receive a letter from America, for example, made one suspect. To have belonged to a Zionist organization was a crime. The trouble was, one never knew what was considered to be undesirable and suspect. People lived in fear, while we children were taught that we lived in the best of all possible worlds, under the great and wise leadership of Stalin. We were taught in school about the great courage and dedication of a young boy, Morozov, who had informed the police on his father. His father was a Kulak (wealthy peasant) who hid grain to avoid turning it over to the state. We were taught that loyalty to the state came before family solidarity. When my parents heard about it, they were stunned and, perhaps a bit more cautious in discussing things in front of us. As the summer of 1941 approached, I looked forward to a summer vacation and I hoped to be able to go to a sleepaway camp. The Soviets established camps for Pioneers. Once again, fate took a different turn: on June 22, 1941, the Germans attacked the

Soviet Union and we were again at war.

When the shelling began we were at grandmother's house. We tried to make our way home but bullets were flying everywhere. We found shelter with a Jewish family and walked home the next day. On our way home, I saw the first casualty of the war, a young Soviet soldier lying on the sidewalk, as though asleep, with his knees pulled up to his chest. I recall the shock of seeing a dead person for the first time, especially one so young. Little did I know that in the months and years to come, death would be such a close companion and the shock would wear off before long. I thought about his mother, who did not yet know about her dead son and I grieved for both. During the battle in our town there were a number of civilian casualties. The Soviet troops withdrew shortly thereafter. There followed a few days of "interregnum" when the local Ukrainian peasants started to kill Jews in outlying villages. Stories were told of Jews bound with barbed wire and thrown into the Dniester River and of Jews killed in cold blood. The first troops to enter our town were Hungarians, then allies of Germany. For the first time we saw Jewish refugees being driven by the Hungarians through our town. The people were in a most deplorable condition. The townspeople tried to help with food and water. Some of these refugees left their infant children behind with the Jewish community. A Jewish orphanage was established and Zionist youth groups cared for these children. Some of the Hungarian soldiers were very brutal. In my grandmother's house three officers were billeted. They amused themselves by shooting at the ceiling or unleashing their dogs on innocent civilians. My mother's cousin, Vovok Friedman, was mauled quite badly.

A few weeks later, the Hungarians pulled out. The Germans occupied our town and the reign of terror began. They erected gallows in the center of town, and hanged eight randomly selected Jews as a warning of what would happen to anyone who did not follow their orders. Day after day, new orders were issued, each more vicious and distressing. For example:

All Jews from ages 14 to 60 must register for forced labor.

All Jews must wear a blue Star of David on a white armband.

Jewish children cannot attend school.

Jews cannot socialize with Christians.

Jews cannot work for Christians or Christians for Jews.

All Jewish businesses and factories were taken over by the Germans

Jewish doctors and lawyers cannot practice their profession.

All radios, gold, silver, furs, etc. must be turned over to the Germans authorities.

Needless to add, if a German fancied anything, your house, apartment, furniture, paintings, or other valuables, it was his for the taking.

The greatest government sponsored and executed robbery in history, was taking place in broad daylight. My parents, who remembered the Cossacks of WWI, were stunned by such behavior by, what they believed, was a civilized nation. Little did they know to what depth of brutality and depravity that nation would sink.

My father and my brother went to register for forced labor service. My father was assigned to his former job, as an accountant in the flourmill, I guess because they could not find an Aryan to take his place. One of my brother's work assignments was to pave the German commandant's courtyard with tombstones from the Jewish cemetery. If I could only describe my mother's face, as she stood at the window each evening awaiting their return! One never knew if they will come back or in what condition they might be. People were shot at work and beaten and many drowned building a bridge over the Dniester River.

As I mentioned before, we lived next door to my school. When school reopened, I watched my non-Jewish classmates walk to school and I did not quite understand why I could not go. I had been a good student, well behaved, why was I excluded? I still asked WHY and saw the pain in my parent's eyes when they tried to console me.

My father's boss was a middle-aged man named Miller. Father used to tell us that he was not a bad man. One evening, we still lived in our house at that time, he appeared with his orderly at our door. He sat down, took off his holster and gun and started talking with my parents. He seemed a bit drunk and my parents were terrified because a German was not supposed to socialize with Jews. As the evening progressed, he entered the room I slept in, and as I woke up, I saw him standing over my bed, mumbling something in German that I did not understand. I was told later, that he

called me "my blond angel". He then went into the kitchen, put a gun to my mother's head and demanded that she confess that "bei dieser ist ein Arier gewesen" an Aryan had fathered this one. My brother sneaked me out of the house and we walked through back streets, since there was a curfew in town, to my grandmother's house. I did not quite understand what was going on, I was more scared of the darkness than of the German. I learned quickly, though. A few days later, I was playing with two of my cousins in our garden. We were shaking our plum tree and collecting the sweet plums when, suddenly, we saw a German standing at the fence and motioning to us. We stood frozen not understanding what he wanted. We then realized that he wanted some plums. We gave him all our fruit and ran away. We began to understand the danger each German posed for us, we just did not know that you couldn't run far enough away from their murderous intentions. My two little cousins did not survive the war.

In October, a Ghetto was established in our town: a few streets in the predominantly Jewish section of town were designated as the ghetto and barbed wire was strung across the street at the entrance. We had to leave our house and move to my grandmother's house, which was inside the ghetto. A horse-drawn wagon pulled up into our yard and my parents put a few possessions on the wagon. They left some valuables with our Ukrainian neighbor. As the wagon began to pull out, I picked up my little white kitten to take her along but my mother told me, that I couldn't take her with us into the ghetto, there will not be enough food to feed her. I was shocked! Not enough food to feed a little kitten? What kind of a place is it going to be? It did not take long to find out.

We settled in one of the apartments in my grandmother's house. We had a large kitchen and a bedroom, quite a luxury in those days. Thousands of people were squeezed into a few narrow streets, not only from all over town, but also from the surrounding villages. The ghetto was closed, and only people who had work permits could leave. I was happy to live again close to my best girlfriend, Genia Reis. My mother assembled a few of my friends and started giving us lessons, which was strictly forbidden, under the penalty of death. We sat in a windowless room and tried

to study. We worked on a sixth grade curriculum, studying language, math, science and history. I later wondered if my mother had not done better teaching us how to make a "molotov" cocktail. My mother tried to keep our lives as normal as possible under the circumstances. Our "school" did not last long, it became increasingly dangerous to walk the streets.

The Germans decreed that a Judenrat (a Jewish council) be established in the ghetto. Initially, the most respected people were chosen, but they soon realized that the Germans were using them to compile lists for forced labor and later for the deportations. Few willingly took on that task. As winter approached, hunger began to be felt in the ghetto. The rations allotted to the Jews were very meager and children with swollen stomachs started begging in the streets. The community established a soup kitchen. Young people from the Zionist Youth groups helped out there, as well as, in the orphanage, where many perished with their charges shortly thereafter. My father still worked in the mill, so we had enough flour and could barter some of it for other food.

My grandmother also established a soup kitchen. At first, only a few children came, but soon the line was getting longer and the soup was getting thinner.

Daily persecutions and indignities were perpetrated against our people. Orthodox Jews had their sidelocks ripped off, people were beaten and many were shot. All businesses were confiscated, people could not work, except for slave labor for which they did not get paid, hunger and diseases were rampant. People bartered their possessions for food. My father had a beautiful stamp collection that he bartered for food. It must have been very painful for him, since stamp collecting was his favorite hobby.

When weather permitted, all my cousins and some of their friends would gather on my grandmother's back porch, the girls would embroider for their boyfriends the Star of David on the armbands that we all had to wear, and romances flourished.. Of course, the deteriorating situation in town was always discussed and suggestions and plans were hatched on how to escape from this hell. News from the front were discouraging, the Germans seemed to be unstoppable, as they penetrated deep into

Russian territory. Every rumor and many predictions were seriously debated. Some of the more outrageous rumor, or wishful hope, was that Hitler was dead.

Then the order came to deliver to the Germans all gold, silver and furs. The people brought most of their valuables to the Judenrat, but many hid a few precious things. My grandmother refused to part with her Sabbath candlesticks. My father and my uncle built a wooden box, wrapped the candlesticks in waterproof material and buried them in the garden. We all assembled at night and were shown where they were buried, should one of us survive and be able to retrieve them.

It was hard for me to understand why the Germans needed my little rabbit fur muff and the fur collar of my winter coat, yet we followed their order, to my great dismay. My mother made for me a new velvet collar for my coat, which looked quite nice.

Men were periodically caught on the streets and sent to concentration camps or shot. At one such roundup, my father was also caught. As he stood in line, his German boss showed up and started cursing and kicking him while screaming at him "what are you doing here when I need you at work?" He got him out of the line, and, for once, saved his life. Next day, this "savior" was given a beautiful hand-woven tapestry that used to hang on our wall.

I kept asking my father what were his thoughts, as he stood there in line, and believed that they intended to shoot him. He said that he saw the nice boots of the guy in front of him and thought he would like to have a pair like that. He tried to make light of it and shield us from the devastating reality.

Friday, December 4, 1941, an order was issued that all Jews must assemble in front of the Great Synagogue to be inoculated against typhus. The Germans said that those who will not have a certificate of inoculation will not be allowed to remain in town. Some wondered why the Germans suddenly cared about our health, but a prominent doctor in town, assured everyone and said that he had been ordered to assemble nurses to help him. My father was skeptical and decided to hide us in the flourmill where he worked. At night, we stole our way from the ghetto and reached our old house. My parent still had the keys to the house. Very quietly we opened our kitchen door. The place was empty and cold. I remembered how warm and cozy the kitchen

had once been, full of wonderful odors emanating from the large hearth, especially the smell of freshly baked chalah and sweet breads that my mother baked on Fridays. I felt such a pain in my heart for our shattered lives. We had to steal our way into our own house like thieves! In one part of the house lived some people whom we did not know, but in a room next to the kitchen lived a Ukrainian man who knew about us. At night, as my parents, my brother and I lay huddled together on the floor, this man, whose name I don't remember, entered the kitchen and covered us all with a sheepskin coat. This simple act of compassion brought tears to my eyes. Before dawn, we made our way through back streets to the mill. My father hid us in a dark little nook on the second floor of the mill. As daylight came, we heard shots and cries from the town. We huddled in freezing cold and agonized about the fate of our family and friends in the ghetto.

Next day, a Saturday, we lay very quietly behind some sacks of flour. The mill was in operation and we feared to be discovered by the workers and denounced to the Gestapo. Some of the townspeople would denounce a Jew for the promised pound of sugar, or even for nothing. On Sunday, all seemed quiet, no more shots were heard. Next day, we made our way back to the ghetto and, as we approached the area, cries and lamentations were heard from every house. With beating hearts, we approached my grandmother's house and found most of the family together. My Uncle Nathan and his children, Bella, Max and Wisia were in tears because their mother, Mincia, had been taken away.

We found out that the "akcia" (roundup of Jews) had lasted two days. When the people assembled near the Synagogue, they were suddenly surrounded by the Gestapo, SS, and the Ukrainian police. They were then herded into the Synagogue and kept there for two days without any food or water. The Gestapo and their helpers swept through the ghetto with their dogs in search of more people. The blood curdling screams of "Juden raus" (Jews get out) were heard throughout the ghetto. On the third day, trucks drove up to the Synagogue and our people were driven away. Among them was my mother's youngest sister, our tall, beautiful redhead, Aunt Mincia. The whole family was in despair.

My sick and ageing grandmother, the pillar of strength throughout the whole ordeal, tried to calm everyone. She said that as soon as we shall find out where the people were taken to, we would send to my aunt packages of food and warm clothing and we will try to buy her freedom and bring her home. We went to sleep somewhat consoled, only to wake up next morning and learn about the tragedy that had befallen our people.

Half of the town's Jewish population, 2500 men, women and children, were driven 12 km. from Horodenka, to Siemakowcze. There, they were forced to disrobe in a barn and made to run in groups of five to the open pit where they were shot. One woman, who was only wounded, came back to relate the horror she had seen. She told us that, as music was blaring, (to muffle the sound of the guns) and the vodka was flowing, the Germans and their helpers took turns at shooting these innocent men, women and children. After the "akcia", the Gestapo chief Doppler came to the Judenrat and demanded 2500 Marks for the bullets that were used to kill the Jews.

As the news spread through the ghetto, a terrible despair overwhelmed everyone. Some tried to flee across the border to Romania but, as we later heard, many were caught and were shot at the border. A number of people committed suicide. Some tried desperately to acquire Aryan birth certificates and documents and hide out as Christians outside the ghetto.

The Germans did not waste anything; they collected the clothes of the victims, ordered Jewish women to launder them, and then sold them in the local stores. One day, a friend of our family came into our house sobbing; he had just recognized the dress his wife wore on the day she was taken away.

We felt doomed, and abandoned, and the world was silent...

One winter morning, I walked out on the porch; the yard was covered with fresh fallen snow and the ice on the trees glistened in the sun. I felt so overwhelmed by this incredible beauty, and kept wondering why were we doomed for destruction? It might have been one of the last times that, in my innocence, I asked God WHY?

Everyone tried to build a hiding place, a bunker as we called it. My father built one in the attic. He made a false wall, disguised as a bookshelf, not unlike the one I saw a

few years ago in Amsterdam, where Ann Frank's family was hidden. We would go to sleep only partially undressed and before dawn, when the akcias would usually begin, make our way to the attic.

I remember my father carrying me half asleep to the shelter. We had stored there blankets and pillows as well as water and dried crusts of bread. At daybreak, if the Gestapo did not arrive in town, we would go down. Mother would prepare a warm meal, and another day in the ghetto began.

News of killings and atrocities in many communities around us reached our town. Everyone feared that there would be more akcias. The Germans always tried to calm the population; they would say that if people worked hard and gave what was demanded of them, there wouldn't be any more killings. The German commandant of the city told the Judenrat that if the Jews gave him five kilos of gold, he would see to it that our town would be spared. The people in town collected the gold and gave it to him, hoping to save our town. Needless to say, it was a futile attempt.

On the first day of Passover 1942, when I woke up and walked into the kitchen, I saw my mother crying silently. I had rarely seen her cry before, and asked her what had happened. She told me between sobs, that the Germans had burned the ghetto in a nearby town, and when the people tried to jump out of the burning buildings, they were all shot.

The expectation that the gold that was collected would spare our town proved to be a false hope. On Pesach, April 12, 1942, the second akcia took place in Horodenka.

A few days before, when the news reached us that the Gestapo and their helpers were heading for our town, many people tried to find a hiding place wherever they could. Some built elaborate underground bunkers, some tried to find a friendly Christian family to hide them. My father took our family again to the flourmill where he worked. The day before we left, I said goodbye to my closest girlfriend, Genia. We met near the exit of the ghetto; she and her family were going to hide in an abandoned brick factory.

The akcia started again at dawn. Shouts of "Juden Raus" (Jews out) resounded throughout the ghetto as the Gestapo and their helpers swept with their dogs and

searched in every nook and cranny for terrified, defenseless people.

I remember being awakened the second day in our hiding place, by the most plaintive whistle of a locomotive. I did not know then but found out later, that on that train bound for the Belzec death camp was my childhood friend, Genia Reis. Genia had brown eyes and lovely brown curls. She loved comic books and always insisted that some day she would live with her aunt in America and become a famous singer. I could never dream up anything more exciting, she always won, hands down. Genia was twelve years old.

With our hearts beating, we made our way to the Ghetto, fearing what we would find there. We heard pitiful crying and wailing from every house that we passed. As we entered Grandmother's house, a weeping Aunt Zlata threw her arms around me, and held me tight. She had lost her only child, my oldest cousin Wisia, nineteen. We all had looked up to her. She was a small-built girl, pretty, with dark curly hair. She had finished the gymnasium, and was a very gifted designer of beautiful dresses. I remember watching her with admiration as she made lovely flowers out of velvet and different scraps of material for the cotillion ball at the gymnasium. She also loved to comb my long hair and arranged it like a crown on my head.

My poor aunt was devastated. She told us that someone had brought her a note that had been thrown out of the train. Our teacher of Jewish religion in the public school wrote that she was together with Wisia and would take care of her. We were all grief-stricken. I felt guilty. Why did I survive and not Wisia? She was an only child. She was all my aunt had.

News trickled back about the death camps. Hopelessness and desperation demoralized some people. Some turned to religion and said, "surely the Messiah will come now during this, our greatest need". They drew scorn from others who questioned the absence of God in the death camps. There were even those who turned to superstition and used cards to predict the end of the horror. Most people suffered in quiet desperation.

The third akcia started on September 2. Once again, the Gestapo and their helpers

spread through the ghetto and searched for Jews. The beatings and atrocities cannot be described. All people found in homes and bunkers were brought to the railroad station and packed into cattle cars. The akcia continued for two days. People found after the trains left, were shot at the Jewish cemetery.

After the killers left, we returned to the ghetto. We learned that my Uncle Nathan and his son Max, 14, were on the train bound for Belzec. Most of the inhabitants of the ghetto had been taken away. Our town was declared Judenrein- free of Jews. Within a few days, only those who had a special V permit (valuable Jew) could remain in town. All remaining Jews were taken to the ghetto in Kolomyja.

We assembled for the last time at my grandmother's house. The situation seemed desperate. My father had a V-permit to stay in town, but he could not keep my mother, brother or me with him. He decided to send us to his sister in Zaleszczyki, where the ghetto still existed, hoping to bring us back as soon as he could find a hiding place for us. My Uncle Jacob and his wife Gita had found a hiding place with the help of a Ukrainian friend. We were all very concerned about our grandmother, who was weak and ill, and would not survive a trip to the next ghetto. The family decided to spare her more suffering and put her gently to sleep with a lethal injection.

My Uncle Jacob was a chemist. It was decided that while she was taking her afternoon nap, he would give her the injection. Her children would bury her and recite the Kadish for her. In the afternoon, my parents, Aunt Zlata, Cousin Bella, little Wisia, Julek and I sat in a room next to her bedroom. When my uncle entered her bedroom, we all sat motionless, tears running down our faces. A few minutes later, the door opened and my uncle came out sobbing. He apologized to us, saying that he could not do it. My poor uncle, not even his great love for his mother could turn him into a mercy killer. I don't know what others in the room felt, but for me it was such a deep sorrow, knowing what was awaiting her. But I also felt some relief, because I loved my Babcia so very much.....

My uncle then gave each person in the room, including the children, a poison pill. We had to promise that, we would use it only as a last resort.

During the next few days, a few people who had been on the train came back to town.

They described the horrible conditions on those trains and how they had torn away the barbed wire with their bare hands and jumped from the moving train, while the Germans were shooting at them. My Cousin Max returned and tearfully related how he had pleaded with his father to jump but he refused. My friend Genia's father also returned and I shall never forget his desperate and battered face when he learned that his son Lusiek, who had jumped with him, did not make it back.

Horodenka had ceased to exist as a Jewish city. The pitiful remnants were driven on foot to Kolomyja. My grandmother and other old and sick people were put on horse-drawn wagons. The rest had to run as the Germans and the Ukrainian police on horses beat them with whips. My mother was on that march and she told us how my cousin Max, who was at the end of the row, was absorbing most of the hits. She put her coat over his shoulders to protect him somewhat.

Some young people fled to the surrounding forests, acquired guns and formed partisan units. Some tried to join up with the Russian partisans who we heard were hiding in the woods. My Uncle Jacob with his wife Gita told us that their Ukrainian friend had found for them a hiding place. I heard after the war that the peasant who hid them probably killed them himself.

We heard that across the Dniester River the situation was a bit better, and that Jews did not have to live in ghettos. My father decided to send mother, Julek and me to Zaleszczyki. My father's "friend", a Pole named Franek, came with a horse and wagon to Horodenka to fetch us. We stood in front of our old house, my father embraced me and, for the first and only time, I saw my father cry. It scared and puzzled me: why was he crying? We would be back together soon as he had promised. It was the last time I saw my father.

Clad in peasant clothes, we drove to Zaleszczyki, some 25 km. away. In the past, Franek used to come to visit us, occasionally. He would always put me on his knee and tell me how my father had saved his life during WWI, when he had been my father's orderly. My father trusted him. What little of value we still had was given to Franek for safekeeping.

We arrived in Zaleszczyki, only to learn that the town had been declared Judenrein,

free of Jews. All the Jews had to leave within a few days for the ghetto of Tluste. We made that track on foot, some 15km. It was a nice day, we walked leisurely, without a police escort.

In Tluste we were met by a chaotic situation. Thousands of people were crowded in a few narrow streets of the Jewish ghetto. The Judenrat assigned housing for everyone. We wound up in one room with four or five families. Each family was huddled in a corner. My mother, my brother and I had a bed crudely made out of planks in which we all slept. The sanitary conditions were appalling. There was no running water, we had no soap and no way to keep clean. Food was scarce and our meager resources ran out very quickly, and we had to depend on the community soup kitchen. Our only hope was that our father would soon find a hiding place for us in Horodenka and bring us back.

Once a week, at an appointed time, my father called us. He usually spoke with my mother at a public phone. Use of public phones was strictly forbidden for Jews, but we had no choice. She related to us that father was almost ready to bring us back. One day in the fall of 1942, my mother was not feeling well. On that day my brother and I went to speak with him. We stood together in the public phone booth when, suddenly, I saw my brother turn pale like a ghost. All I heard him say was "when?" I did not need an explanation because I fully understood that he was gone. The secretary at the flourmill told us that when the Gestapo came to take him away, his boss insisted that the books were not in order and that he still needed him. The Gestapo men then said that they would wait 24 hours, till he brought the books in order. My father completed the work and was taken away. I have never been able to find out about his final fate, only the fact that he never returned.

When my mother heard the news, she was totally devastated. We tried to comfort her, as best we could. We were now left on our own. In the ghetto raged an epidemic of typhus and, my brother Julek became sick. The people with whom we shared the room insisted that we take him away to a hospital because typhus is highly contagious. The community had taken over one house and called it a "hospital", though it had nothing even remotely resembling one. There were no doctors, nurses,

nor medicine of any kind and there was very little food. Families stayed with their loved ones and tried to take care of them the best they could. Most patients died. My brother ran a very high fever and was delirious. We placed him on an old door and carried him on that cold winter day to the "hospital". The place was not heated, so one day I bartered some clothes for a log of wood to heat the room in which my brother lay. I borrowed a saw and started cutting the log. My hands were numb from the cold and I could barely hold the saw. I cried in my frustration but continued to struggle. Finally I managed to cut the log and ran with it to the "hospital". We placed the wood in the stove, but it would not burn; the peasant had sold me green wood. It only smoked and filled the little room with a choking smoke. We had to open the window and let the bitter freezing cold come in.

The situation in Tluste worsened as people were caught on the streets for forced labor. Everyone had a bunker in his or her house. The "hospital" had a bunker as well. It was a deep tunnel dug under the house that one entered through a hidden trap door. The opening to the bunker was under a metal plate next to the stove, the kind people used to store kindling wood and catch falling sparks or ashes. One day, when we heard that the Ukrainian police had just entered the ghetto, everyone jumped into the bunker, including my mother and I. Someone pulled a bed with a corpse in it, over the entrance to the bunker. As we sat there, I pictured the Ukrainians shooting my brother as he lay defenseless and alone. I could not bear the thought of it, and jumped out of the bunker. As the police entered the house, I took off my coat and when they asked what I was doing there, I said that I was a nurse. They looked around and left. Apparently this time they were looking for able-bodied men for forced labor. This was not a shooting party of the sick, as had happened many times before.

Before my father was taken away, he sent to us our cousins Bella, 17 and Wisia, 9, who had both been left all alone. Bella, was sixteen years old, she had long brown braids and was a very kind and serious young girl. She took care of her nine year old sister Wisia (there were two Wisias in our family) Little Wisia was a deaf-mute child, Bella could best understand her. She never heard the shot that ended her short life only a few months later.

My father's cousin, Jonah Schechter lived in Tluste. When he heard about our living conditions, he found for us a room not far from his house. My mother now had to care for four kids. Our funds and things to barter for food, like clothing or some valuables, were running out quickly. The rations we received were so small and we were constantly hungry, especially my brother who was recovering from typhus.

Jonah Schechter asked me if I wanted to make some money by selling notions to the peasants on market days. I jumped at the opportunity of peddling some of the merchandise he had saved from his store. I had to take off my armband with the Star of David, get out of the ghetto and mingle with the crowd. My blond hair and non-Semitic features helped and I sold needles, threads and all kinds of notions. I had to keep a keen eye at all times for the police, because leaving the ghetto or walking without the armband was punishable by death. In this way, I earned a bit of money and could buy with it some grain. Jonah had hidden grindstones and, at night, we would gather in his house and grind the wheat into flour. We always placed a watch outside, to be sure that we were not discovered. To own a grindstone was also punishable by death, as were so many other things in those days.

Life was very difficult and brutal during that winter. We had to carry water from the only water pump in the ghetto, over a mile away. We did not have warm clothes, since we had left home before the winter. On cold days, my fingers would stick to the handle of the metal bucket. My older cousin Bella and I tried to do most of the chores that required being outside of the house, because we feared that my brother might be caught for forced labor. One day, as I went out to get water, I suddenly saw before me the chief of the Ukrainian police with his helpers. He stopped me, asked where I was going and whether I knew that when he walked through the ghetto he did not want to see any filthy Jews. He slapped me in the face and told me to run. As I ran up the hill, I heard shots being fired but they missed me. I came home without water but I did not want to tell my mother what had happened, so as not to worry her even more. Some worried neighbors ran into the house after me, so she found out anyway. I was more careful in the future, so as not to run into that brutal beast as he walked through the

streets of the ghetto, creating fear and loathing in everyone.

One day, as my mother and I were visiting my Aunt Netti Rosenbaum and Cousin Lusia, we met there a Russian man who earlier had rescued my younger cousin, Julia, and taken her with him to his home in the Ukraine. He brought greetings from her and a letter in which she wrote that she was all right and that this man could be trusted. We looked at him as a saving angel. At least one of our own was safe from certain death. My mother sighed and said how happy she would be if there were someone who would be willing to take her daughter. He looked at me for a moment and said "get her ready in two days I will take her to a far-away village to a friend of mine and tell him that she is my cousin I will get papers for her as an Aryan". My mother was overjoyed, she ran home quickly to tell my brother and cousins the good news. Everyone felt so happy for me. The next two days were hectic. Mother tried to patch up my clothes and shoes to look presentable. She spent hours trying to teach me the catechism and how to behave in church. Having been a teacher in Polish public schools before the war, she had to be present in class as the priest instructed the children. As time passed, my resolve to leave weakened, though mother kept repeating over and over again "someone must survive to tell the world". One of our greatest fears was that we will all be killed and no one will know our fate. The German's told us that even if one of us survives and tries to tell what happened here, no one would believe him.

In the evening of the second day, I was supposed to steal my way out of the ghetto and meet the Russian man at the railroad station, buy a ticket, enter the train and take a seat in a designated compartment where he would wait for me. All this was, of course, fraught with great danger.

As the time approached to leave, I said goodbye to my brother and cousins and walked with my mother to the end of the ghetto. As we walked through those crammed and filthy streets, I tried to chisel into my memory the horror picture all around me, starving people lying on door steps, emaciated children huddling in doorways. I must remember it all I told myself. As we approached the end of the ghetto, I took off my armband with the Star of David and embraced my mother. We stood there for a while in

a tight embrace, not saying anything. At that moment it became very clear to me that I would never see her or my brother again.

I thought that no Jews would survive the war and that I could be the only one to survive, having lived a lie. I would live among people who, even if they had not actively participated in the destruction of my people, had certainly stood idly by. It was too high a price to pay. I told my mother that I decided not to leave. I put back my armband and we walked back to our room. She did not try to urge me at that point, she understood that the final decision had to be mine, even though I was only fourteen years old. My brother and my cousins were stunned to see me back, I had a chance to get out of this hell but did not take it.. I would like to believe that, in some way, they were also glad to see me back. I shall always be grateful to my mother that she let me make that final decision' it gave me a few more weeks with her, my brother and my cousins.

My mother made one more attempt at saving my life. Needless to add, she would have gone to any length to save my brother, but it was much more difficult with a boy. In the town of Tluste lived one of her former Polish colleagues and his family. We made our way to his house. She knocked on the door, and he opened but would not let us in. Mother begged him to take me in, repeating that I did not look Jewish, that nobody will recognize me in this town but he would not hear of it. She then begged him to give me his daughter's birth certificate or baptismal papers, which could save my life. He refused and slammed the door in my mother's face.

She seemed so desperate, I felt so sorry for her and tried to tell her to, please stop, that I did not want to leave anyway. She knew what awaited us all.

In that bitter winter of 1942, my mother contracted typhus. She was already very weakened from starvation. We had no doctors, medicine and very little food. We tried our best to take care of her. One evening, I felt very hot and also came down with typhus. I lay down next to her in bed. Suddenly, there was a knock from our next-door neighbor. She told us that the Ukrainian police and the Germans had just entered the ghetto and she urged us to hide. My mother sat up in bed, turned on the light, and fell back on the pillow. I started to cry. She embraced me, and spoke to me in Yiddish,

which she had never done before, saying "du wirst noch glicklich sein main kind" loosely translated "you will yet be happy one day, my child". Though I was on and off delirious, I still remember wondering what a strange thing to say under those circumstances.

What happened during the next few hours is a blank; I recall that later in the night, my brother knelt next to my bed and told me that our mother had died. I tried to turn my head but couldn't, for a while. I finally managed to look down on the floor, where my mother lay covered with a sheet and a candle burning next to her. I learned later that my brother had borrowed a sheet and a wheelbarrow from a neighbor and, under cover of darkness, brought my mother to the Jewish cemetery where he buried her. He told me that he put a bottle with her name in the grave and he promised that one day we would put up a gravestone.

The epidemic of typhus was at its height, 20 to 30 people died each day. The people tried to bury their dead secretly, to hide from the Germans the extent of the epidemic. There were rumors in town, that the epidemic started after seventy Jews, who had been imprisoned in Buczacz, were released and sent back to Tluste. Most of them came down with typhus.

I don't remember very much of the days and weeks that followed, I was unconscious and delirious most of the time. My brother told me later that he managed to get a Jewish doctor to come clandestinely and examine me. The doctor found that I had pneumonia as well as typhus.

My brother credited my survival to the "miracle of the eggs". Next to the ghetto lived a Polish man who had once worked with my father in the eggs export business. He found out about us four orphaned children and he came to visit us always bringing some eggs along. We had no other food, but the eggs kept us alive that winter. More than enabling us to survive, this man had brought into that world of darkness and despair a ray of hope, decency, and compassion. To my great regret, I do not remember his name.

When spring came, my brother and cousins took me outside to sit in the sun. I could not walk and I was very weak. I wanted to go to the cemetery where my mother was

buried, but my brother promised to take me there when I got better. With my recovery came a terrible hunger. One day, my brother sold some of my mother's clothes and with the money he got, we went to a clandestine bakery to buy a piece of bread. We got half a loaf of freshly baked bread; it smelled so wonderful and we were so hungry. We took a little piece, and then a little more, and before long, the bread was gone. We felt full of remorse and shame because we had nothing left to bring to our hungry cousins. We both cried on our way back because hunger had brought us down to such a state. It never happened again, but the memory of it, still haunts me.

In May, the news spread through town that the Gestapo in Buczacz was preparing to come to Tluste and that an akcia was imminent.

The commander (manager) of six agricultural estates (folwarks) in that area was a German by the name of Paul Friedrich Fati. He was reported to be a decent man, who tried to help the Jewish community. He employed Jews for agricultural work on the estates. Rumors had it that if you worked for Fati, you would be treated decently and will be protected from the Gestapo. You had to have an "Arbeitskarte" (work card) to be assigned to one of the six estates: Kozie Gora, Szarszenuwka, Holobczyńce, Rorzyzuwka, Szypowce and Lisowce. Tluste was deserted as the news spread of the impending akcia. Some people hid in elaborate bunkers, others fled to the fields and forests. My brother and I went to the Judenrat to find out what was happening. One of the members of the Judenrat saw us and said "what are you children doing here, don't you know that the Gestapo is on the way?" We told him, that we had no hiding place and nowhere to go. He quickly wrote out a work card for us and told us to go to the Lisowce work camp because the Gestapo might not get there.

We started walking out of the city. On the way, we saw entire families running with their children. We saw Ukrainians robbing and beating people as they tried to flee. By evening, we arrived in Lisowce. The place was deserted. Most of the workers had fled, fearing that the Gestapo would try to round them up too. We found an empty barrack, huddled in a corner, and fell asleep. Next day, many of the workers returned, since it seemed to be a quiet day. We met the Jewish leader of the camp, who assigned to us a barrack and we went to work. We worked in the fields, hoeing sugar beets and the

"koksagiz" plants. These plants looked like tobacco, and were supposed to produce a rubber latex. When the leaves were picked, a white liquid would start to drip which gave us headaches. I never found out whether any rubber was produced. We did get bread and soup at noon. After the starvation diet in the ghetto, this was a great improvement. In the open field one could also find some carrots and other vegetables to add to our rations.

The second day after our arrival at the camp, the news reached us from Tluste, that an akcia was in progress there. We saw local peasants flocking to the city with their sacks slung over their shoulders, ready to enrich themselves with the belongings of the dead Jews. After the akcia was over, I decided to go to Tluste to see if our cousins and my aunt Netti and her daughter Lusia were safe. They were hiding in what everyone thought was one of the safest bunkers in town.

As I approached the town, I had to pass the Jewish cemetery. The sight was unbelievable: bloody and torn clothes were strewn everywhere. Near the entrance of the cemetery, was a huge freshly dug grave. The peasants were afraid to walk by. They said that the earth moved over the grave and blood oozed from it like a fountain. I walked to the ghetto, and found corpses still lying around. The door to our room was ajar. The room had been ransacked and no one was there. My cousin Bella 17, and her deaf-mute sister Wisia, 9, had been killed. I proceeded to my aunt's place, only to find out that the "foolproof" bunker had been discovered. All the people hiding there were shot.

I returned to the Lisowce with the sad news. Of our once large family, only Julek and I now remained. Most of the people in the camp had lost loved ones. Sadness and despair gripped us all.

Reports of killings in the neighboring work camps made us realize that the camps were also not safe. A group of young Jews made contact with a Polish underground partisan group and arranged to meet with them in a nearby forest. I stood to the side as my brother and the other older boys were having discussions with them. It developed that they did not want to accept any of our people into their group, unless we had weapons or money with which to buy guns. When they found out that we had

neither, they left. We were very disappointed, but we did not know whether this might have been a ploy to get money from us.

In the neighboring camp of Rorzanowka, one of the Polish supervisors- I think his name was Zawacki- had known my father. Julek and I went to see him and asked whether he could help us get away on Aryan papers. He said that he would try to help me but could do nothing for my brother, since Jewish boys could be easily identified. I thanked him and told him that without my brother I was not interested.

In Lisowce, some of us worked in the stables, some worked in the blacksmith shop, the majority worked in the fields. Very early in the morning, the Ukrainian guard would assign work to us. We would march to the fields together with some of the local peasants who were also conscripted to work for the Germans but, of course, they were free to go home after work. I can just see the columns marching with our hoes over our shoulders. The peasants would usually break out in song, as the mist was rising over the river when we crossed the bridge, one could almost imagine an idyllic summer scene of happy farmers going to work in their fields. Those fields, which were soon to become the killing grounds soaked with the blood of the innocents. We also worked many times at the threshing machine. One day in July, the camp was full of rumors of an impending akcia. A lot of people fled to the woods and fields, and my brother and I also ran away. We lay in a wheat field in the hot July sun for many hours. We were terribly thirsty but were afraid to move. The day passed quietly, and we returned to the camp. My brother worked on a night shift at the threshing machine; my group was to start later. I went to a Ukrainian woman who lived close to the field and asked her for some food to bring to my brother. She was a poor peasant woman who lived in a one-room little shack working for food and wages in the fields of more prosperous farmers. She had a good heart and, on occasions, she shared some food with me. That evening, as she was cooking a potato soup, the usual staple, I kept asking her if it was done, since I was very nervous and anxious to bring some food to my brother, but she kept delaying me. Finally, she gave me a pot of soup and I ran with it to the field, where my brother worked. We sat together and ate. It was the last time I saw my brother alive.

I lay down to sleep next to a haystack, because I was to start my shift in the morning. Next to me lay a woman with two children, a boy of about four and a girl of six. Children, of course, were not allowed in camp, but the mother was hiding them. Before dawn, shots awakened us. When I opened my eyes I saw two Ukrainian policemen and an SS man standing over us. One shot was fired and the little girl was hit in the foot. She bled profusely and whimpered quietly. We were told to stand up, raise our hands and walk to an assigned place. When we got there, a group of people was already sitting on the ground with their hands behind their backs. Men were ordered to dig graves and the shooting continued. I was relieved that I did not see my brother among the doomed and hoped that he had escaped.

I never saw a more beautiful sunrise. I felt very calm and reasoned that, if our sages and teachers were right and there is a world beyond (Olam Ha'bah), then all would be well and I would soon be reunited with my parents, family, and friends. But if there was only this world of horror, then to be finished with all this suffering, humiliation, constant fear and hunger would also be a relief. I only hoped that they would shoot straight and it won't hurt too much. We said goodbye to each other. Nobody cried. No one pleaded for his life.

Suddenly our German commander, came riding on a horse. We heard him scream at the Gestapo, that he needed us to complete the harvest and that they must stop the slaughter. The shooting stopped. We began to collect our fallen comrades, seventeen young boys and girls. Among them my brother Julek, seventeen.

I returned to the deserted camp totally devastated. Most of the people had fled, fearing that the murderers would come back. I did not care any more, I lay in the barracks and cried. The following day, some of our people were told to dig up the temporary graves and move our dead to a mass grave. As they started digging, I saw the clothes of my brother I fainted and was carried back to the camp. I am sure had I had the poison pill my uncle had given us, I would have gladly taken it. My brother had it on him, in a secret pocket.

A few days later, as we worked in a field near the river, one of my friends pointed out to me the new grave. I walked over and stood there for a moment. The Ukrainian

guard screamed at me to go back to work, and then proceeded to urinate on the grave.

During the days that followed I was in a haze. I stopped going to work and wandered aimlessly in the compound. One day, as I walked with my head down, I saw before me a pair of black boots. As I lifted my head, there stood our German camp commander, I was sure that the end I had longed for had arrived. He asked my name and age. I lied and said that I was eighteen. Rather than being punished for not being at work, he told me to go to his house and tell the cook to give me some food and clean clothes. I was stunned because I did not know then, that, in spite of the fact that he was a relative of the notoriously vicious Gauleiter of Poland Frank, he was a decent man.

For the first time in many days I ate a meal. For the first time in many months I could wash up and put on clean clothes that were not full of lice. One of the hard things to bear in camp, was the total lack of sanitation. Our fitful sleep was not only interrupted by nightmares, but also made unbearable by lice. We wore the same clothes day in and day out and we also slept in them.

During that summer of 1943, I worked in the attic of the commanders house, knitting sweaters. I met there a girl my age that had also been left alone. Being together with Fritzka helped me to find my bearings again and recover somewhat. As we sat knitting, we talked about our life before the war, we even dreamed of a world after the war. We pledged never to be apart, should we survive. The news was beginning to reach us about the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, how we envied those people who died fighting. A new will to go on was revived in us- a will to survive, to bear witness and, yes, to take revenge for all the innocent blood spilled. A strong desire to see that evil empire destroyed burned in us.

One day, I met Mr. Zawacki and he told me that he was willing to help me get away on Aryan papers, now that Julek was gone I told him, that it was too late, that I preferred to live and die with my people.

I did make an attempt to see Franek, my father's "friend". I wanted to see a friendly face, someone who had known my family, and tell him of my sorrow. I exchanged my clothes and shoes for a peasant's outfit and started walking some 10 km. to Franek's

village. I was barefoot, as the peasants in our region usually walked. As I approached the police station in Tluste, I noticed a roadblock. I had no papers, but it was too late to turn back. When my turn came, I was asked for my papers. I spoke Ukrainian pretty well at that time and I told them that I had come from the mountains to earn some money during the harvest and I did not know that I needed papers. Somehow, I must have been convincing enough because they let me go.

As I walked by the road and saw peasants peacefully tending their fields, I felt such a pain in my heart: why were we hounded like wild beasts? When I passed peasants on the road, I greeted them with the traditional greeting of "Blessed be Jesus Christ" and they answered, "May He be blessed for ever and ever". I wondered, "was it this savior who had taught them so much hatred"? How could two thousand years of teaching a religion of "love" produce killers in such great numbers?

By the time I got to Franek's house, it was already evening. I knocked on the door, Franek opened, but when he saw me his first words were: "What are you doing here? They killed four Jews in the village, yesterday" you can't stay here. In my fantasy, I thought that he would embrace me, and that we would shed tears together at the fate of my family. It was a severe blow, but I recovered quickly. I told him that I would only stay overnight and leave early in the morning. I asked him if he could give me a pair of old shoes because my feet were bleeding; I was not used to walking that many miles barefoot. Franek told me that he did not have any shoes. I asked him if he had a pair of old rain boots, but he said he did not. This was the man whom my father had trusted, who had buried in his garden my uncle's medical instruments and other valuables. He told me that I could stay overnight in the barn and then he brought me some food. I could hardly eat, in spite of my hunger.

Later during the night, Franek came in with another man whom he introduced as a friend of my father's who was willing to help me. I don't remember the man's name. He said all the right things, how he is going to get false papers for me and help me get away to a large city. Something in the tone of his voice and his demeanor did not seem right. I was only fifteen, but I sensed danger. I had a feeling that he might call the police the next day to get the pound of sugar promised as a reward for bringing in

a Jewish person. I thanked him and went to sleep. Very early the next morning, when Franek came in to milk the cows, I told him that I was leaving. He gave me half a loaf of bread and I left, still with no shoes.

My only desire was to reach the camp, to be again with my people. I did not want to die like a dog by the wayside. If I had to die, the last thing I wanted to see, were Jewish eyes.

I made it back safely and was happy to be again with my friend Fritzka. We were usually assigned to the same work detail, we shared every scrap of food, and we slept in the same bunk.

One Sunday when we were not working, I decided to wash my hair. I melted some snow and was heating the water, when I heard a friend run by and scream that the Ukrainian police had been seen entering the camp. Half undressed, I ran toward the stables where one could find a hiding place. Suddenly I felt someone put a heavy sheepskin coat over my shoulders and lead me away from the camp. It was a Ukrainian man from a nearby village, who used to come to the camp and barter food with people who still had some things of value. I was not one of them since I no longer had anything, but I used to see him around. He led me to a peasant's house near our camp and hid me under the straw in the attic. This time the police did not stop in our camp and drove on. When the news spread, that this Ukrainian peasant had endangered his own life to save a Jewish girl, he became a trusted hero among our people. He used to come often and even honored me with a proposal of marriage, disregarding the danger this would have entailed for him. Needless to say it was not something I considered for even a moment, but I thanked him anyway.

Sometime in the fall, we heard that a group of young Jews had formed a resistance group in the forests and that they were armed. One of them came to our camp for his sister. I met with him; he was willing to take me along. We arranged to meet in the next village, at an appointed time. Next day, I started walking along the river toward that village. I wore the only clothes I had, an old peasant's skirt and blouse. I saw on the other side of the river two Ukrainian policemen on bicycles and felt a bit uneasy, but I continued to walk. The place near the well where we were to meet was deserted.

I reasoned that having spotted the police they had fled. I was devastated. More than anything I wished for at that time was that I had a gun, to make the murderers pay. A few days later, we heard that the police had hounded down the whole group of Jews. No one had survived. Two Ukrainian policemen and a German were also killed.

On my way back to the camp, I saw two Jewish girls sitting on the side of the road and crying. They told me that some peasants from the village had raped them. I was, obviously, very upset. But on what scale does one measure this crime with death all around us?

The winter of 1943 was very severe, we worked outdoors, without gloves or stockings. Since I had bartered away my shoes I was walking around barefoot, even in the snow, until one of my friends made for me a pair of wooden shoes. When I tried to take these shoes off at night, I had to tear off the bloody rags from my feet. Lack of proper nutrition caused many carbuncles to form on my feet and my arms.

Later in the winter, they moved us from the barracks to a peasant's hut. In one room lived seven girls and the family D. consisting of four adults and one young child who did not go to work. One of the girls who was slightly handicapped was our cook. Firewood for cooking was hard to come by, even though forests surrounded the village, because it was forbidden to cut down any trees. One evening, when our firewood was all but gone, one of the girls and I decided to take a chance and cut down a tree in the forest.

Each blow with the ax reverberated throughout the forest, or so it seemed to us. We managed to cut down a tree and now we had to bring it back without being detected. It was still dark and, as we crossed a small brook, my end of the tree fell down and broke the thin ice on the brook. I tried desperately to lift it, but my fingers were numb from the cold. A new day was breaking and we had to get back to the hut. Finally, we made it and hid the tree in the snow next to the hut. Tired and cold we were greeted with relief and joy.

The typhus epidemic had also spread in our camp. One day Fritzka and I tried to hitch a ride to work with a friend as he drove by on a horse-drawn sled. He motioned to us not to sit down, even though the sled seemed to be empty. We were puzzled; R. had

always been helpful and friendly. Later, we found out that on the sled covered with straw were two bodies of our people who had died of typhus. The man was trying to get them out of the camp and bury them secretly, without the police discovering how bad the situation really was in the camp. It was common practice for the police to regularly come to the camp and shoot sick people.

One night, covered only with our thin clothes, I felt that Fritzka was burning up. I did not need a medical diagnosis to know that she had typhus. I tried to cool her burning forehead with snow and then went to work. We were working outdoors at the threshing machine. Around noontime we heard shots in the camp. The Ukrainian police had gone through the barracks shooting all sick people. A friend told me that when they came to our hut they told him to help Fritzka get down from the bunk. He tried to help her put on her shoes but she looked at him and said, "where I am going I don't need any shoes". She was shot in front of our hut. Only a dirty brown stain remained when I came back from work. Fritzka was no more. She was fifteen years old.

It was hard for me to go on, only the news of the fall of Stalingrad and the wish to see the killers punished and to bear witness helped us get through another day.

In January, a group of Jewish men came through our camp. They were attached to the Hungarian military as auxiliary troops, to dig ditches etc. This was a forced labor battalion and they did not carry any weapons. When the men realized that they had come upon a group of Jews, they could hardly believe it. They told us that they had marched through much of the Ukraine without encountering any Jews. They were so happy to see us and we, of course, also rejoiced at their presence. A few quick romances developed. One of our girls left with the Jewish boys. They put her in a uniform and tried to smuggle her out of the camp. At an inspection before crossing the bridge over the Dniester River she was discovered and shot.

Every day, long convoys of Ukrainians and Russians who had collaborated with the Germans were passing our camp. The German retreat was growing day by day. We heard the boom of the great Russian guns, the "katushas", and our guards confirmed that the front was moving closer. They assured us that they would kill all of us before

the Russians reached our camp. The "Banderovcys", Ukrainian nationalist armed groups, were a constant threat to us. We heard that they had held a meeting at which they decided to kill all Jews, so as not to leave any witnesses. They also encouraged the peasants to do the same.

We were in mortal danger from these groups. They overran some of our camps and murdered many Jews. At this point, the Gestapo was not much in evidence. They were too busy looting and dispatching their booty to Germany.

What happened then was a curious paradox: the German camp commander was protecting us from the Ukrainian mobs. The Germans realized that they were losing the war and some of them, I guess, got tired of the killings. The camp commander told all the Jewish workers to assemble in the largest camp in Tluste where he would protect us from the Ukrainian mobs. More and more German troops were passing through the town and spending a day or two. The withdrawal was in full force. One day when I woke up in the stable where I slept, a new group of retreating Germans arrived. A young German soldier offered me a candy bar, he kept pushing it at me, and telling me in German to take it that it was all right. I refused to take it, even though, I was very hungry. It took all my will power to do so. My hatred for every German was total, I did not want anything from their bloody hands.

Some of us were working at the railroad station, loading everything movable onto flat cars going to Germany. Next to the railroad station, was a huge mountain of grain. The Germans did not have enough time to load it, so they poured gasoline on it and set it on fire.

On March 27, 1944, quite suddenly Soviet troops entered the town and liberated the camp. We were all overjoyed to see them. They told us that they had traveled thousands of miles but had never seen a Jewish camp. Some even wondered whether we might be German collaborators. That suspicion passed quickly and they were very nice to us. Unfortunately, before we could take a deep breath of freedom, only half an hour after our liberation, 27 German Stuka planes bombed our camp. The wooden barracks burned quickly and many people died in the fire. Many were also hit by machine-gun fire.

The night before, the family D. took me along with them to a village nearby, where their friend hid us. Next day we made our way back to the camp. What a horror picture met us: wounded and moaning people were everywhere. I was asked to go into one barrack to help a wounded girl. She lay on straw and the stench was terrible. I took off her cover and saw a huge gaping hole in her chest. I tried to comfort her and told her that we would take her right away to a Russian field hospital. She asked me to hold her hand but it was too late for any help. Her beautiful voice was now stilled forever. I had known her: she used to sing for us on some quiet evenings, songs that were not happy and joyous ones, but melancholic and sad ones, songs about home and family whom we missed so much.

Our sudden liberation was due to the fact that a large German army had been encircled around the city of Tarnopol, and the Soviets advanced so rapidly, that the Gestapo and Ukrainian police had no time to eliminate the camp. On the second or third day, we heard that the German army was breaking through the encirclement and that the Russians were retreating. We started running after the Russian tanks getting as far as Buczacz. There, totally exhausted, we found an empty house and fell asleep. In the middle of the night, we heard the rumblings of Russian tanks and armored cars leaving the town.

We were terrified that we might fall again into German hands and started to follow the Russian army. It was snowing heavily and was very cold. A few hundred emaciated and totally bedraggled Jews were running as best they could. I had those wooden shoes on and could not keep up very well. We were in some woods, following the Russian army that was moving along on the road. We were behind them, and from each side Banderovcys and German soldiers were shooting at us. At one point, a Russian soldier on a tank extended his hand and pulled me up onto the tank. What happened next, is a complete blank. A few hours later, my friends found me half-frozen, sitting propped up next to an overturned tank. I don't know what happened. I gather I was caught in a battle.

My friends were able to get me to walk with them to the next town of Podvolochisk. There the Russians were in complete control and we were finally free and safe. Did I

say free and safe? Free yes but safe, hardly. We, the pitiful remnant of our communities, were unwelcome in our former homes. We heard many times from the local people that the one good thing the Germans did was to kill the Jews.

A few of us from the camp who had reached Podwoloczysk found an empty house and took it over. We felt safe knowing that a few Russian officers lived across the hall. Now began the daily struggle for survival. We did not feel safe going to the villages to seek food. We used to go to the Russian field kitchens and ask for food. They usually gave us some leftover soup or a piece of bread. It was a daily task and we all took turns. We were all waiting impatiently to hear that our towns were liberated and that it was now safe for us to return and look for family and friends who might have survived.

One day, a Russian soldier came to our room and said that his commanding officer had sent him to look for a blond girl whom he had seen at the field kitchen. He finally spotted me and said that his officer asked him to bring food and vodka for us, that he would come later and we would have a party. Soon afterwards, an officer from one of the Central Asian Republics came riding on a horse decked out with a Persian style rug under the saddle. He wore a black cape and across his chest was a bandoleer of bullets.

More soldiers arrived with food and drinks. Someone brought an accordion and the party was in full swing. The officer insisted that I sit next to him. He told me how much he liked me, and that he wanted to marry me. Everyone had a good time and, for the first time since the war, there was plenty of food to eat. I was beginning to feel more and more apprehensive.

When I stepped outside, one of the officers who lived next door saw me. He had heard all the commotion in our room and he took me aside to talk to me. He asked whether I knew what a "voyenaya polevaya zhena" (war field wife) meant. I said I did not know. He explained that what this officer had in mind was to use me and drop me in the next town. He urged me to get away. He happened to be an older Jewish man and he was very kind to me. I hid in a deserted hut until the party broke up, late that night. I was told the next day, that "my" officer had become quite drunk and was very

angry that he could not find me.

My hate for the Germans consumed me. I wanted to revenge the innocent blood they had spilled. Without telling anybody, I decided to enlist in the Russian army. I had passed for eighteen in the camp, so I thought that I could do it again. All I wanted was a gun in my hands.

I went to the military command post and told them that I wanted to enlist. I was told to wait for the commanding officer. I waited for quite a long time. It was getting dark and there was a curfew in town. I was afraid that I would not have enough time to return to my friends, but the people at the command post kept assuring me that the commander would come soon. As night fell, I was told that I would have to wait till the next day. I was led to a room in a peasant's hut.

I sat on the bed and tried to rest. Suddenly I heard the door open and a young soldier walked in. He tried to lay down next to me and make love. I spent the whole night crying and begging him to leave me alone. He was a very young boy, not a vicious rapist. He realized how young I really was-not quite sixteen- and he finally fell asleep holding me in his arms. In the morning he gave me a loaf of bread and a box of sardines. I walked out, saddened but wiser and realized how naïve I had been.

I started walking back to my friends. Suddenly, I felt very faint and collapsed. I lay on the ground, in deep mud. Many people passed by me and nobody tried to help. I was sure that the end had now come. I looked up at the sky, white clouds passed above.

The puddles of water glistened with many colors from the oil spilled on the road by military vehicles. I thought, at least I will die free. I don't know how long I lay there, but I recovered and returned to "our" house. I gave my friends the loaf of bread and the can of sardines, but did not tell anyone what had happened. I was too ashamed of my naivete.

We waited for another week until we finally heard that our area was free of Germans. We started hitchhiking home with Russian soldiers. The first town we came back to was Tluste, the hometown of some of my friends. We found out that the old and sick people who could not run away with us were killed when the Germans reoccupied Tluste. I then went back to Horodenka. When the army truck stopped in the center of

town, I saw that my house had been destroyed. I talked to some of the Jews who had returned and they told me that it was unsafe to remain overnight in town because the Ukrainians were killing returning Jews. I found out that no one from my family had returned. My only hope was that my Uncle Jacob and his wife might have survived. I learned that the peasant who hid him had killed him. I left my hometown of Horodenka. I would not return for fifty-three years.

I went back to Tluste where I still had friends. Again, every day was a struggle to get some food. One day, we heard that across the border in Romania there was enough food. A few of us hit the road again. We arrived outside of Czernowitz, only to be told that the city was closed to refugees. We waited till nightfall and, with the help of a guide, waded across the Prut River. Someone led us to an empty apartment where, totally exhausted, we lay down on the floor and fell asleep.

Next morning, as the bright sun streamed through the window, I woke up and looked out. I could not believe my eyes- the city looked untouched by war. Streetcars were running, and well-dressed people walked in the streets below. It was only some thirty or forty miles from the towns we had left but here was a totally different world.

Our group went down to the street corner. We were immediately surrounded by townspeople because we must have looked quite bizarre in our wooden shoes and rags. We were the first group to come from across the border. Many Jews in Czernowitz had relatives in Poland and they inquired about them. We did not bring good news. It turned out that one of the men in the group was a cousin of my mother's and he took me home with him. His wife was startled by my appearance. Aunt Etelka, as I came to call her, proceeded to burn my filthy clothes and scrubbed me from head to toe. I looked at the bathroom mirror, and was shocked.

I had not seen a mirror in many years. I remembered a child's face, but when did I grow up? How did I age beyond my years?

It was difficult to learn to live again, as hope faded that anyone of my family had survived.

A few weeks later, I heard that my cousin Julia, who had survived on Aryan papers had returned to Zaleszczyki and I immediately went there. We had a sad reunion. I

stayed with her a few days. About that time a telegram arrived from the Soviet military informing her that her father, a physician who had been drafted at the beginning of the war, was killed in the battle of Stalingrad. She told me that she planned to go to Palestine, which she eventually did.

I returned to Czernowitz. During the following years I made my way to the American zone in Germany. In March 1949 I arrived in the United States.

Returning to Horodenka, Fifty-three Years Later

August 22, 1997

We are sitting at the Zurich airport, and waiting for our flight to Warsaw. I have such mixed feelings...I thought I would never see the country of my birth again; the place of so many bitter memories. Yet, this is also the place where my carefree childhood years passed among cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents. What pulls me there? Primarily, a wish to visit the ancestral graves, if any still exist.

I know it will be strange to see the place, most probably quite unchanged physically, yet so totally different, bereft of all its Jewish population.

I feel quite agitated as we approach Warsaw, so many thoughts go through my mind, I close my eyes for a moment and dream what it would have been like to return home for the first time and introduce my husband to my family. I know this cannot be, yet I go on wishing that my return to my birthplace, after more than 50 years, would be different.

We arrive at the airport, the custom officials wave us through, without opening any suitcases or asking any questions. Many people wait outside, entire families with flowers and cameras, to capture that special moment. We wait for our suitcases, standing there a bit lost. I start a conversation with an Israeli father and son. We exchange a few words, where are you from, where were you during the war, a version of Jewish shorthand. The rest of the story each one of us can imagine quite well. They are going to a little town near Warsaw to visit family graves. A deep feeling of sadness overwhelms me. That is all that is left for us in Poland. For many, not even a grave remains.

We arrive at the Holiday Inn on Zloty Street, a modern American style hotel. We find out that a small part of the remaining ghetto wall is in the back of our hotel. I can hardly sleep, thinking how many people died trying to breach that wall! On

this side of the wall, life apparently went on; very few Poles cared about the horror happening just a stone's throw away.

We walk to the Warsaw Ghetto Monument, the imposing granite sculpture by Nathan Rapoport. We read that the granite blocks were originally cut for the Germans to build a victory monument in Berlin. We walk up a few steps to the monument and say a quiet Kadish. We then visit the mound on top of Mila 18, the site of the last bunker. Around the bunker spreads a large lawn. We saw several families picnic and sunbathe near this sacred place.

Saturday morning we arrive at the only remaining synagogue in Warsaw, the Nozik Synagogue. It escaped destruction because the Germans used it as a stable. As we approach the synagogue we see armed policemen at every corner, and with good reason, as we soon found out. We cannot enter through the main door because it had been firebombed, a short time ago. On the wall we can still see clearly an outline of a swastika. Anti-Semitism flourishes in Poland, even without Jews.

Inside, what a sad sight meets our eyes, a few elderly people at prayer and a few tourists, in this lonely synagogue in Warsaw, once the largest Jewish community in Poland. I go up to the women's gallery. Next to me sits a lovely young woman crying. I put my arm around her and try to say a few consoling words. She understands very little English, she is French. We don't need a common language to share the deep sadness that both of us feel. I understood her to say that her parents perished in Poland.

Next day, I met a childhood friend. We were fifth grade classmates and he was also in the labor camp with me. Remembering the young boy of fourteen, it took a few minutes to recognize the seventy-year-old gentleman. I was worried that I had forgotten how to speak Polish, but language was not a problem, hearing Polish spoken all around me, it came back in no time. We had a lot of catching up to do; over fifty years have passed since I had last seen him. He had changed his name, married a Polish woman, became a highly educated man, but retained a good sense of humor, which enabled him to make ironic remarks about his former communist views.

He took us for a visit to “Stare Miasto”, the old part of Warsaw, which was leveled during the war and fully rebuilt from existing plans, exactly the way it had been before. We walked around this new-old town, crowded with tourist and souvenir stands. On one stand, I saw a wooden doll of an old Jew in a prayer shawl with an exaggerated large nose; I found it very offensive.

When I said something about the behavior of Poles during the war, my friend reminded me that the majority of “Righteous Gentiles” in the Avenue Of The Just at Yad Vashem in Jeruslaem are Poles. This is indeed true, because the atrocities committed against the Jews occurred predominantly in Poland. But today, many Polish families who hid Jews during the war don’t choose to have their names publicized. Apparently, it is no honor in Poland to have saved a Jewish life.

August 24

Sunday we arrive at the Warsaw train station and wait for a train to Krakow. People are sitting on the floor, no benches or chairs are available. A Gypsy mother with a child is begging. I try to buy a postcard of the ghetto monument, none is available, I settle on a view of Warsaw.

The train arrives. A Polish train, what horrible connotations this evokes! But everything in Poland stirs such tragic memories. It is a beautiful day, the sun is shining and the train leaves on time. We pass lush gardens, grain ripening in the fields but I can’t forget for a moment that we are traveling to Auschwitz! In our first class compartment soft drinks and refreshments are served but I hear the cries for water. . The sound of the train whistle chills me to the bone, even though, the day is unusually hot. I recall again and again the loved ones who traveled in trains not like this but on the same tracks on their last journey...

Through the cracks in the cattle cars they could see the same lush landscape and peaceful and quiet houses now passing in front of our eyes. Surely the people in those homes saw trains full of people crying for water pass their homes, and then the same trains return shortly afterward empty.

I venture to say, that most of them were quite relieved that the Germans solved their "Jewish Question", to use their euphemism

As we approach the villages, the spires of churches gleam in the sun. We see horse-drawn wagons piled high with hay and conical haystacks dot the fields. We used to hide in these haystacks during the akcias. The Germans would come with pitchforks and stab at them looking for hidden Jews. We pass a Polish cemetery, and see people laying flowers on the graves. Will I find the place to lay my pebble, as our custom dictates?

August 25

We stayed overnight in Krakow and were picked up by a taxi driver very early in the morning for our trip to Auschwitz. The day was sunny and hot. As we neared the front gate of Auschwitz with the notorious sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" we saw tour busses and individual cars arriving in large numbers.

Our guide was a young student, an intelligent and pleasant young man. He was well informed, as well as considerate. The first part of the exhibition dealt mostly with Polish and Russian prisoners of war. Pictures of those people were mounted on the wall. Most were Polish names. He dwelt a long time on the fate of the people. At that time the prisoners still had names and pictures, those who came later, mostly Jews, had only numbers tattooed on their arms.

We went through the barracks and the exhibit halls. We had seen movies and pictures of these exhibits hundreds of times, yet when you stand in front of a mountain of human hair, of eyeglasses and children's shoes, something inside you is shattered forever.

There are buildings for people of different nationalities who were imprisoned in Auschwitz. There is also a Jewish building, where pictures and documents are exhibited.

We then walked to Birkenau, where mostly Jewish prisoners were housed. Very little of the camp remains. There are acres and acres of grass and field flowers where the barracks stood. We lit a candle and said Kaddish and laid flowers at the destroyed crematoria. At this point we were totally drained and numb. The open pond where human ashes were dumped is yellowed with age. The barbed

wire can be touched now: no electricity flows through it. German factories which provided Zyklon B gas to murder innocent people are still in business and prospering. What kind of men conceived this hellish place? What monsters ran this killing factory? No, these were not cannibals of New Guinea, these were members of an elite nation in Europe, who claimed as their own Beethoven among others. Did they listen to his ninth symphony? The message of brotherhood surely did not penetrate to this "Herrnvolk" of music lovers.

At the end of the tour, we were shown the gallows on which Hoess, the commander of Auschwitz, was hanged.

Was justice done? Most of the perpetrators went free and today receive pensions from the German government for their "work".

The German success in the war against the Jews of Europe was total. The only thing they did not succeed was to cover up their ugly deed, though they tried.

Busload after busload of people come from all over the world and walk in stunned silence. We saw Japanese tourists bringing flowers.

The victim's silent scream is heard around the world.

The communist regime was careful not to insult their member state; in all their exhibits and monuments they refer to the Nazi killers. The word German is never used. These were not some strange creatures who landed from outer space, occupied Poland and built these concentration camps; real full-blooded Germans organized this terror. No doubt, many of them were Nazis. They did not show us their party membership cards; we just saw murderers, torturers, and robbers, on a scale the world had never seen before. Out of forty five million eligible voters in Germany, 38 million voted for Hitler; surely many of them have read "Mein Kampf" or listened to his speeches and were fully aware of his evil plans.

August 26, 1997

Very early in the morning, as the sun is rising, we arrive at the airport in Warsaw and wait for a Polish Lot airline plane to take us to Lwow, or Lviv as it is now called. We are getting closer to my hometown. I try to brace myself, knowing full well what I shall find there, or rather who and what will not be there...

The Warsaw airport is quite modern. My Polish is improving, I can speak quite well by now. My husband, who never studied the language, does not hesitate for a moment to try to communicate in Polish, to my great amusement. They all smile and try to help. Many people, especially the young, speak English. One hears a lot of English expressions.

Our small plane, only half-full, takes off for Lwow, and one and a half hour later we land in that city. Our passports are examined over and over again; as we get on the buss and when we enter the terminal. A new and strange world awaits us, where once was our home. The terminal is crowded to capacity; most of the passengers are Ukrainian nationals from Canada and the US. A form had to be filled out declaring how much money and valuables were brought into the country. The customs officials look grim and most of the luggage is searched. A few people are taken to a booth, asked to remove their money belts and produce the money they are bringing into the country. The money is then counted in full view by the customs agent. For some unknown reason, the customs official just waves us on, without opening any of our bags. The terminal looked dreary and run down, as was almost everything in the Ukraine. I asked for direction to the bathroom but was told that there isn't a working one in the terminal. I begin to regret that we undertook this journey.

Outside, friends and families wave and cry, anxiously awaiting their loved ones. The taxi driver from the Cheremosh Hotel in Chernovtzy is waiting for us. He looks most dignified in tie and jacket, speaks some English and is a pleasant fellow.

The hotel, less than ten years old, is dark and depressing and not well maintained. During our stay there were hot water outages and several blackouts. The staff, some of whom speak English, were always friendly.

Horodenka, was once home to over 5,000 Jews. Edik, "the last of the Mohigans", as he refers to himself, picked us up at the hotel and drove us to Horodenka. In some parts, the town has changed drastically. On the main street, once lined with Jewish stores, there now stand a few non-descript Soviet-style apartment houses. The streets are in poor condition, as was the case everywhere we visited. Houses

built before the war are badly in need of repairs; it seems that little was done for their upkeep, only some additions here and there, to add an extra room. Our first stop was at the flourmill where my father had worked till the end, when the Germans picked him up. The mill, at least seventy years old, still operates. It was owned before the war by three Jewish families. We were immediately surrounded and greeted by the workers who recognized that we were foreign visitors. The manager, a very friendly woman, allowed us to visit the mill and take pictures. We climbed all over inside the mill, looking for the place where my father hid me, my brother Julek, and my mother Genia during the roundups of Jews. This was, obviously, a very emotional moment for me. I remembered how we huddled in a dark corner that terrible December day, listening to the shots and cries, when terror struck our community. Trembling, I walked up the narrow steps, the constant loud sound of the giant flour sifters brought back the horror of those days. I walked down quite shaken. I saw my father's office, the last place I could place him. It was from here that he was taken away, to an unknown destination and certain death.

I was not able to find out reliably, what had happened to my father, since my mother, my brother, and I had left Horodenka earlier for the Ghetto in Tluste. At the Horodenka cemetery we were shown graves of some of the last Jews of Horodenka, who were brought there and shot by the Germans. It is possible that this is also my father's last resting-place. The Jewish cemetery in Horodenka still exists, though most of the gravestones were removed by the Germans and their local assistants and used to pave the streets. It appears neglected and the overgrown vegetation is checked by grazing animals. The surrounding stone wall is gone, but we were told that the survivors in Israel are planning to have a fence erected. There are two mass graves: one for women and one for men, containing 62 in one and 80 people in the other. A memorial monument over one of the mass graves was erected recently by Edik, with the help of survivors in Israel. It has inscriptions in Hebrew and Ukrainian.

The Hebrew plaque reads:

In memory of all the martyred victims of the Holocaust from Horodenka

and vicinity who were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators during the actions, in the labor camps, in the death camps, and by all other means during the period of the Second World War, 1941 - 1945.

The search for my home was futile: it had been bombed by the Germans and destroyed. Our lot is now part of the city park which had been extended all the way to the ruins of the Armenian church. This church and the former Catholic Church (which is described by a plaque as an architectural landmark) now appear like medieval ruins.

A single building remains of the Gymnasium (Polish high school). I remember when my brother took the entrance exam there. How my parents anxiously scanned the list of students who had successfully passed the exam for my brother's name and how happy they were to find it.

Most of the buildings in the former Jewish section around the Great Synagogue are gone, replaced by a large open-air market. The Great Synagogue still stands. Its exterior appears to be in reasonably good condition. It is now used as a gymnasium and an ugly wing was attached to it. A plaque on the wall informs the visitor in Hebrew, Ukrainian, English, and Yiddish:

This is the site of the Great Synagogue of the Jewish Community that existed from 1742 till 1941. Half of this community of Horodenka and its vicinity were taken from here by the Nazis and murdered on Dec. 4, 1941. May the memory of the Holocaust Martyrs be blessed.

I recalled the crowned lions above the ark holding the Torah scrolls; the last time I was there with my friends was on the first day of a new school year for a special service.

On the former Strzelecka street, which had been part of the war-time Ghetto, many old houses still stand. I found my grandmother's house, where my family had also lived during the ghetto period. One woman who now lives there closed her door, probably afraid that we had come to reclaim our home. Another woman was very friendly, invited us in and allowed us to take pictures of what had been my grandmother's kitchen and living room. I spent so many happy hours in this place and also some of the most traumatic days of my life. I tried to find

our hiding place in the attic, but the door was locked. I knocked on the door of an apartment on that floor, to try to get a key for the attic. A man opened the door, he was dirty and quite drunk; the place was filthy. This was ones the beautiful and spotless apartment of the Silber family. I walked down the street, recognizing the homes of my uncle, my friends, and my neighbors. In Horodenka, the Germans achieved their objective: the town is quite "Judenfrei" - free of Jews. I had an eerie feeling walking on those familiar and yet so completely strange streets.

We then drove to Siemakowcze where, on December 4, 1941, 2,500 Jewish men, women, and children were murdered. There, on the mass grave, stands a simple monument, erected some time ago, with an inscription in Russian

"To the Victims of Fascism".

This was the only inscription which the communist regime would allow. After the demise of the USSR, a tablet was attached describing in Hebrew, Ukrainian, English, and Yiddish what happened on that fateful day:

Mass grave of 2,500 Jews - adults and children - from Horodenka and the vicinity who were murdered here by the Nazis on Dec. 4, 1941. May the memory of the Holocaust victims be blessed forever.

Adjacent to the mass grave is a large camping complex, originally built by the communist trade unions for the vacationing of their members. In recent years, the Jewish Agency had rented this place as a summer camp for Jewish children from throughout Ukraine. I felt uneasy, picturing these Jewish children at play in this terrible place, but also gratified that there were Jewish children here, fifty years after Hitler's violent death. On this late summer day, the place was painfully quiet, the Dniester river flowed as majestically as it probably did on that sad winter day in 1941, and the lush landscape belied the unimaginable horror that happened there, in our generation....

Yes, there still is a town named Horodenka, but for me, the Horodenka of my childhood is to be found only in the far reaches of my memory.

Tosia Schneider, born Szechter, spent her early life in Horodenka. She is the only survivor of her family, having spent part of World War II in the ghettos of Horodenka, Tluste, and the labor camp at Lisowce. She came to the U.S.A. in 1949. She studied at the Hebrew Union College and

taught Hebrew for thirty years at Reform religious schools in Morristown, NJ; Augusta, GA; and Atlanta, GA. Her husband of forty-seven years, Alfred Schneider, accompanied her on her visit to Horodenka. He is a professor emeritus of engineering at Georgia Tech and MIT. They have three sons and five grandchildren.

